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As you can see from our *For Your Eyes Only* cover image starring one of Black Rifle Coffee Company's founders, Mat Best, we're holding nothing back. It's Bond...it's big...it's bold—much like Best's remarkable story of successes in all manner of entrepreneurial endeavors, including his never ending quest to help U.S. military veterans. You'll learn a lot more about this man starting on page 32. Plus, visit ballisticmag.com for an exclusive companion video.

Subscribers will catch this quickly when hefting this issue—*Ballistic* is bigger than ever at 164 pages, yet we didn't hike the price! With the newsstands being what they are today, it's a smart financial move to subscribe at an even more reasonable price at outdoorgroupstore.com. The page-count growth, as you'll see, has allowed us to give you an even broader mix of content and visuals, including a bigger dose of editorial related to survival and personal-defense.

We also want to welcome our partners at our "Alpha Lifestyle" publication known as *Skillset*. Our editorial partners in crime will become regular contributors. To start, Jason Swarr's "Excommunicado" piece (pg. 40) should flip your trigger if you're a John Wick or James Bond fan.

Bondier? Yeah, that might be a stretch for a word, but we have an entire section dedicated to the big screen's all-time greatest spy—Bond, James Bond. Perhaps the best part starts on page 12 where you have a chance to win an Outlaw Ordnance custom-engraved and gripped Walther PPK.

We say this issue is "For Your Eyes Only," but truth be told, we hope you share it with a friend over a few dry martinis. Final note: This issue is served hot, but martinis are best served cold—and stirred, not shaken. Cheers!

—The Editors



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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, Franco Nguyen
DIGITAL MANAGER	Matthew Hogan
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT	Richard Ortega
CIRCULATION CONSULTANT	Scott Hill/ProCirc
COVER PHOTO	Alex Landeen*
EDITORIAL INQUIRIES	editdesk@athlonoutdoors.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS/SINGLE COPIES
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GENERAL MANAGER Nick Seifert

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MARKETING & OPERATIONS Carrie Roeder

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ATHLON MEDIA GROUP

CORPORATE OFFICERS

PRESIDENT, CEO Chuck Allen
CFO/TREASURER Mary Lee Vanderkooi

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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BALLISTIC® (ISSN 2573-0290) is published bimonthly by Athlon Sports Communications, Inc., 2451 Atrium Way, Suite 320, Nashville, TN 37214. Single copy price: \$9.95 U.S. and \$10.95 CAN. Subscriptions are six issues for \$32.97 per year in the U.S. Periodicals Postage paid at Nashville, TN, and at other additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send subscription requests to: Athlon Media Group, PO Box 292167, Kettering, OH 45429. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Ballistic, PO Box 292167, Kettering OH 45429. Submissions of manuscripts, illustrations and/or photographs must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. Copyright © 2021 by Athlon Sports Communications, Inc. All rights reserved under international and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction in whole or in part, via electronic or any other means, without written permission of the publisher is strictly prohibited. Printed in the U.S.A. Volume 7 Issue 2. *Ballistic* Magazine adheres to the California Consumer Privacy Act of 2018. For more information about your rights as a California consumer or to opt out of the sale of your personal information, please visit BallisticMag.com/ccpa.

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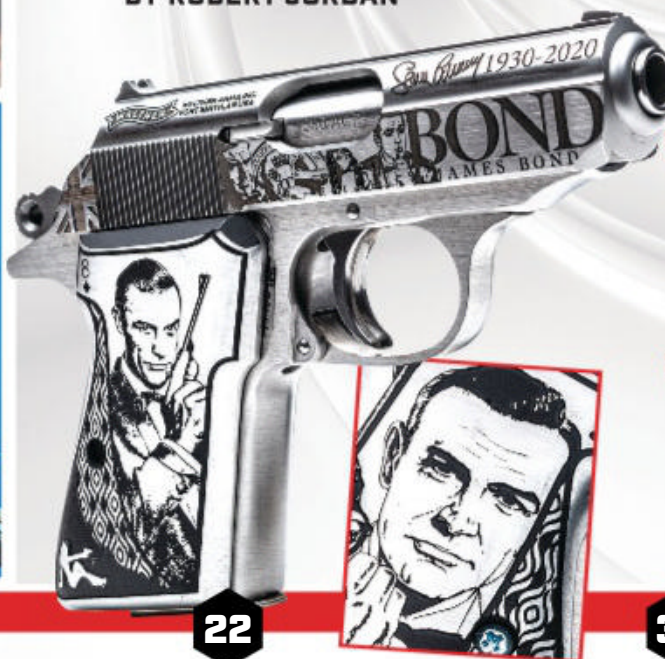
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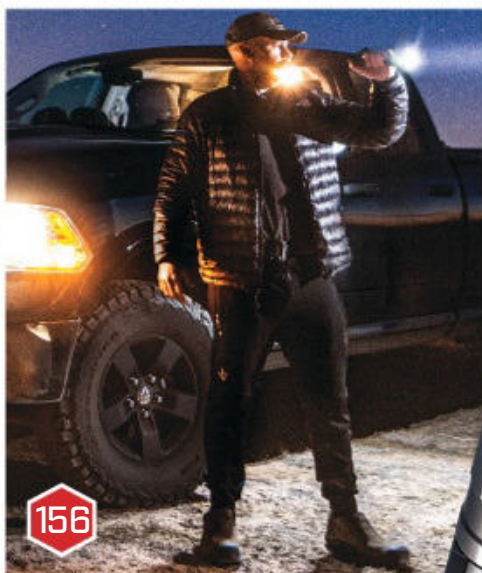
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WHAT IT'S WORTH

NASA's plans to send man to Mars died under Obama-era budget cuts. However, private enterprise once again stepped up to show that anything the government can do, private industry can do faster,

cheaper and better. (That statement will really hurt in 2043 when Robocop replaces me as a law enforcement officer.) Elon Musk's SpaceX now sends all of our astronauts to the International Space Station and he promises to be the one to put Americans on Mars. He claims he will be able to launch SpaceX for a mere \$2 million per flight and send passengers as well as cargo into space. Meanwhile flat earther "Mad" Mike Hughes built rockets for less than \$50K and only killed himself on one of them. The last one to be exact. The point is, if I get enough drinking buddies to cough up \$1K, one of them has an engineering degree or watches Bill Nye, and I am willing to trust Rumble videos for my propellant mixture and safety evaluations, space travel might just be within my reach!



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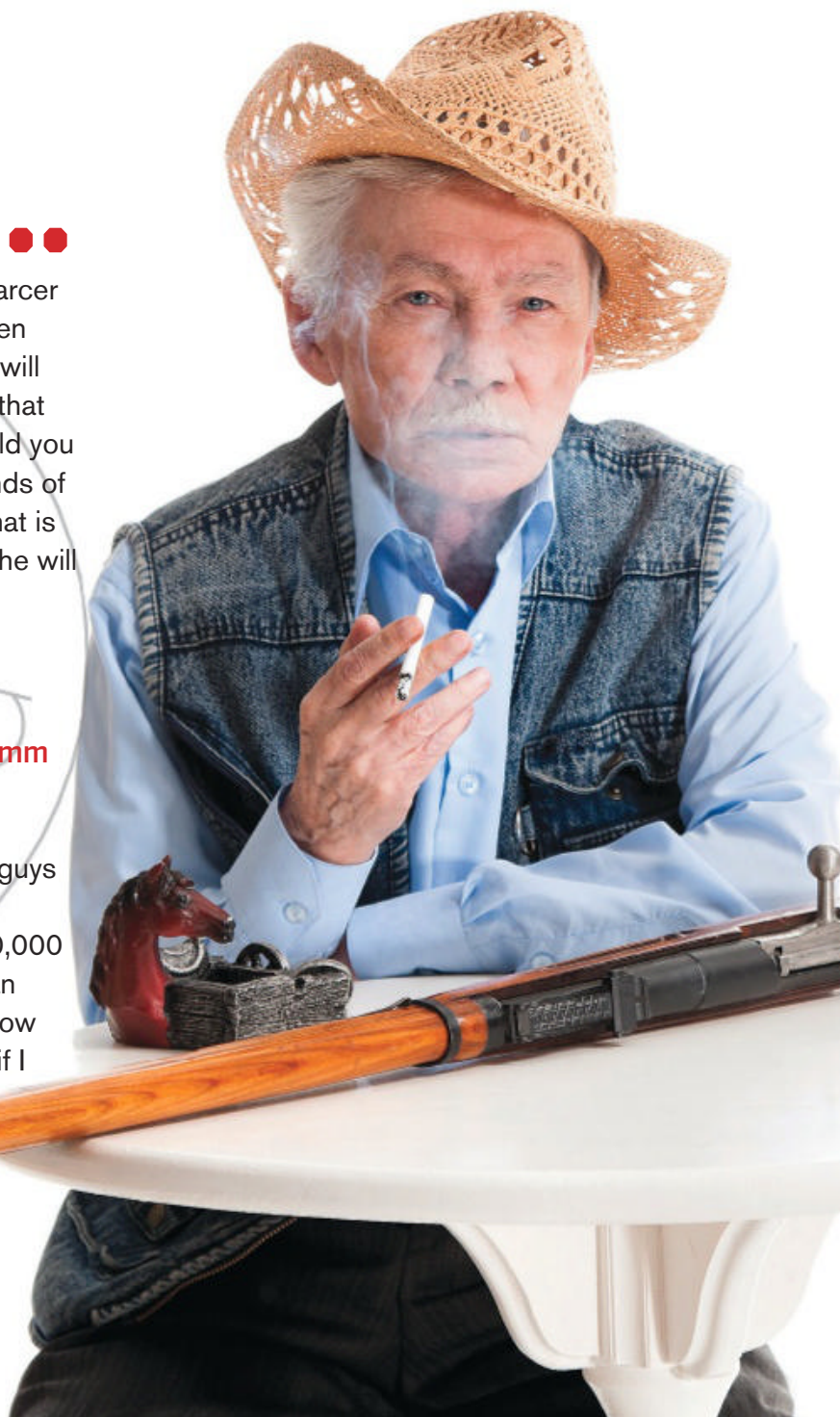
WOULD YOU RATHER...

Guns, ammo and all things I love have been scarcer than hen's teeth since mid 2020 and if Joe Biden brings Beto O'Rourke in as his "Gun Czar," he will probably sell more firearms than Obama did. If that happens, we are all going to be hoarding. Would you rather your uncle died and left you 10,000 rounds of .35 Ackley Magnum (yeah, I don't know what that is either), or 300 rounds of 5.56mm? Of course the will stipulated no trading or selling the ammo.

- ➔ 275 votes for 10,000 rounds of .35 Ackley Magnum [33 percent]
- ➔ 547 votes for 300 rounds of 5.56mm NATO [67 percent]

My vote is with the majority, but a couple of guys had good points:

"I don't care what a gun is chambered in, 10,000 rounds is still 10,000 moments of fun!" "You can always buy 300 rounds of 5.56. I don't even know what the other round is, but I'd buy a gun for it if I had 10,000 rounds of it."



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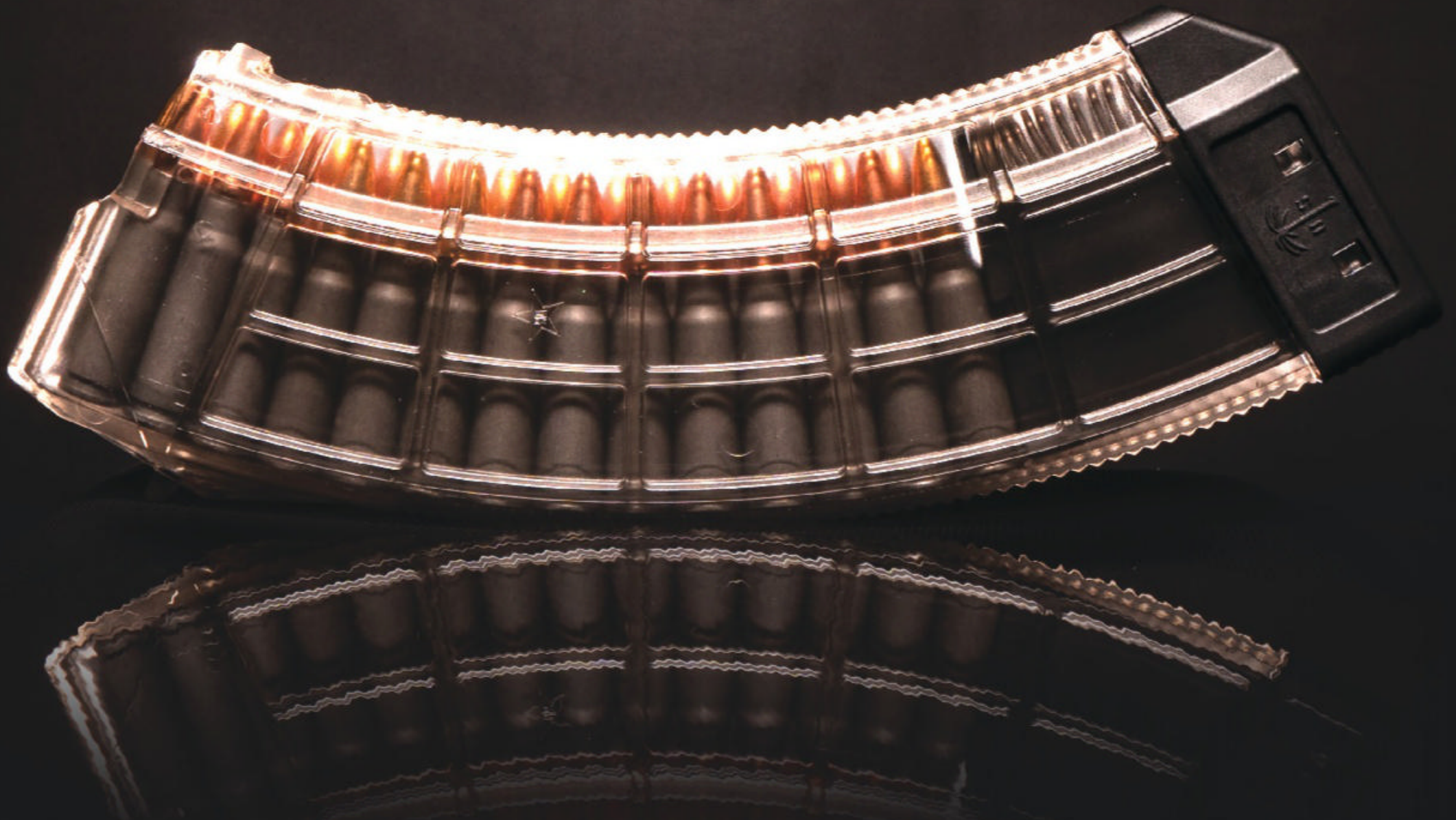
BOOB TUBING

As week 4,000 of the COVID Crisis progresses, home entertainment has run its course. I don't want to play board games with my kids ever again. I learned to macrame and everything in the house is now cocooned in beige cable knit blobs. Even Pornhub sent me an email and said I need to find other hobbies, along with phone numbers for a couple of therapists. My only remaining friend is the boob tube and mindless escapism.

I gave up on watching any series because I drink and inevitably only remember episode one after investing 14 hours in a single night, then have to start over. Anyway, my pick this time is as obscure as it is delightful. The South Korean sleeper *Illang: The Wolf Brigade* turns out to be both mentally challenging and have over-the-top violence. The movie is full of questionable good guys and double-crossing other good guys until they all melt together into a big bowl of spicy kimchi ultra-violence and skinny Asian dudes who look pretty buff with comic book armor and machine guns. The movie actually has a ton of subplots and is even better on the second viewing while you are waiting for Pornhub to take you out of timeout.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
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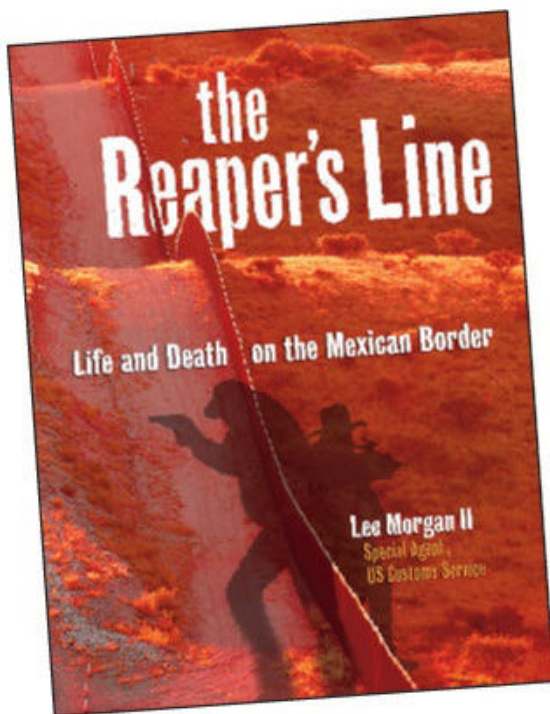
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Read This Book

When old Border Patrol agents meet it is like Vietnam vets talking happily about how much everything sucked and how they were treated like crap and no one cared. There is joy in the shared misery. An old buddy of mine presented me with *The Reaper's Line* by Lee Morgan II the other day. Morgan (who actually worked for Customs) and my buddy shared time on the border in Douglas (pronounced "Dog's Ass"), Arizona. He told me, "Unless you were there, you would never believe this stuff was true. But it is; all of it." Corrupt politicians, violence, shootouts, drug-running cops and general mayhem are retold in a friendly, matter-of-fact tone that will make you feel like you grew up with the author...and you really were there.

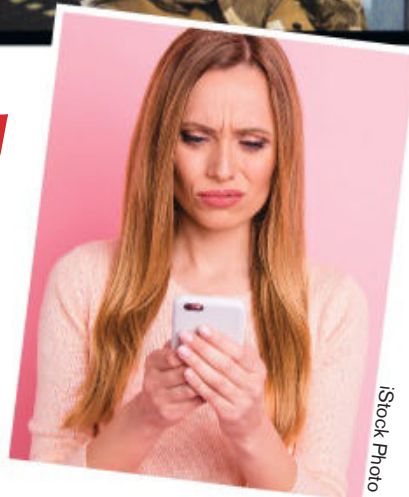


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Fast, Easy Money

My wife wants to redo every room in the house and I reminded her that our last name isn't Zuckerberg, Buffet or Bezos. Still she persists. I need someone who can convince her that every room doesn't have to be Pinterest Perfect. I want them to persuade her that wasteful spending hurts her family because it cuts into my gun budget. I need a professional guilt inducer. Influencers are everywhere. How do I get a guilt influencer—someone who will gain her trust, intrigue her intellect and then slowly destroy her desire to spend money? Can that person be found on TikTok?



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Years ago I was taking a civilian flight to Afghanistan via Baku, Azerbaijan. (Don't look for it on the globe. I tried and apparently it doesn't actually exist.) A small cadre of fellow G-Men were exiting the Azz with me through its only international airport. After they shook us down for every penny we had (the guy with a small backpack and no checked luggage was fined \$50 for excess luggage), we made our way through their immigration and then customs and finally to our gate. That is when they came and found me. Apparently, they found a single 7.62x39 round that had slipped into the lining of the old Border Patrol trique bag I had checked. I found myself spread eagled on the airport floor with four guys securing my appendages and a fifth guy kneeling right below my head. No one understood my English, my Spanish or, "Dirka Dirka Jihad," but when they found my badge and creds they finally got off me. Clothes torn and slightly bleeding, I eventually found myself back at my gate where I was forced to put my thumb print on a rather official looking piece of paper with several paragraphs in black and red ink, sign my name on the bottom of this undecipherable confession, and then tossed onto my plane, where my cohorts were standing and refusing to let them shut the door. My colleagues wanted to know if I had been physically probed in any way. I assured them I had enjoyed every minute so the joke was on them.

Crafty Brews

I'm not a snow bird because every time I try to run away to a better climate my family finds me and latches on closer. I find it is easier to stay in one place and preserve my energy for a future great escape. But if the winter cold is getting you down, can I suggest a trip to Daytona? The second week of March they host bike week, but good beer can be found year 'round. Tomoka Brewing Company in Port Orange, Florida, offers a relaxed, friendly atmosphere without pretense or hype. The Lunar Eclipse Stout is amazing but warm tropical breezes called me to their Oceanside White India Pale Ale. You are going to taste hop and a little grapefruit, and it goes down very smooth. It's just the thing when winter has grown tiresome and you can't wait for summer's return.



GIMME THAT GADGET

Every once in a while you accidentally find what you can't live without. I spend a lot of time at the range and I am always tinkering on guns to try and improve triggers, reduce recoil or thwart the ATF. You get my drift. I've had a Tipton gun vice for years, but I typically just used the vice on my workbench to hold guns. Then someone loaned me a Tipton Standing Ultra-Gun Vise to use at the range. I threw it in the truck once and thought it was a waste of space. Then I used it to switch optics on a rifle. Then I used it to take off a flash suppressor so I could screw on a silencer. Then I switched stocks on a shotgun. Then I cleaned a gun that was jamming



horribly and it started running great again. Then I set it up in my bedroom to hold bottles of booze and mixers, and my wife told me that I loved it more than I loved her.

I casually explained how it never nagged and was always supportive. I'm really gonna miss her, but fortunately the Ultra-Gun Vise will also hold my laptop while I cruise Tinder for a meaningful one-night stand.

COLD WAR, WARM VODKA

A buddy recently came back from Kiev and presented me a bottle of Staritsky Levitsky Reserve vodka direct from the Ukraine, the Bride Basket of Europe. Or is it the Bride Basket of Asia? I never can tell where



Europe ends and Asia starts. We broke the seal and began doing shots—Russian style, slowly and methodically—of warm vodka in the middle of the day. I don't know whether it was the fond memories or the smooth vodka that took me back almost 20 years to meeting with Russian counterparts in foreign lands and realizing we weren't so different at the grunt level. Back then we would have finished the bottle. This time when I awoke I was happy to see there was some vodka left, I was in my own home, and I didn't have to wonder which pictures of me naked in public in a third world country would be showing up the next time they renewed my security clearance. ●

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JAMES BOND

has been a cultural icon for nearly six decades. The 007 Secret Agent has been played by many actors, but for most, Sir Sean Connery is the definitive Bond. The Scottish actor, who passed away last year at the age of 90, was the first to play the role in *Dr. No* when the franchise was launched in 1962.

Based on the books by Ian Fleming, the iconography and cultural impact the film series created is vast: the cars, the girls, the martinis! But all that flirting, fighting and fast driving would be meaningless if the man who was licensed to kill didn't have a proper firearm. Enter the Walther PPK.





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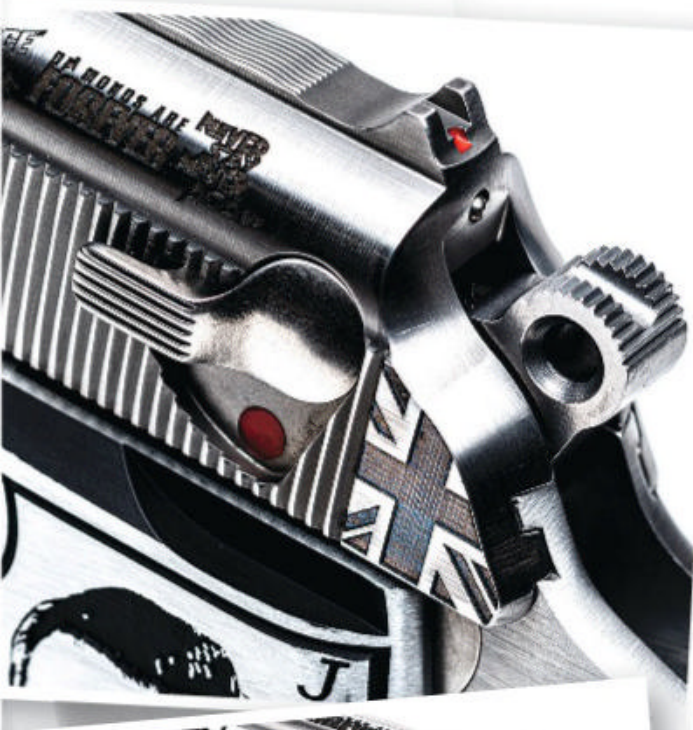
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The pistol features iconic imagery from *Dr. No*, *From Russia with Love*, *Goldfinger*, *Thunderball*, *You Only Live Twice*, *Diamonds Are Forever* and *Never Say Never Again*.





Interestingly, throughout the first six books Bond carried a Beretta 418 in .25 ACP, the same pistol that the author Fleming carried while serving in Naval Intelligence in World War II. It was only after receiving multiple letters from fan and firearms expert Geoffrey Boothroyd that Fleming decided to change the character's weapon to the PPK. Boothroyd thought the secret agent needed a larger caliber, and the .32 ACP Walther was the right choice as it was designed for undercover detectives and widely available across the globe.

I know what you are thinking, "Hey *Ballistic*, this is all cool but we didn't come here for a film history lesson." Fair enough.

GIVING OUTLAW A CHALLENGE

All that said, it wasn't hard for us to come up with a pistol model for this issue's giveaway. Nor was it difficult for us to choose the custom shop that would be responsible for turning this iconic handgun into art that would play well on our 007-esque magazine cover images.

Outlaw Ordnance is no newcomer to the pages of *Ballistic* magazine. Their amazing work has been featured multiple times in recent issues. (Do yourself a favor and check out the Trump Tommy Gun from the April/May 2020 issue available at outdoorgroupstore.com.)

The process of digitally laying out this artwork is time consuming and really where the designers at Outlaw set themselves apart. To start, the design team comes together to decide on a theme. Once the overall direction is determined, the designers start creating the graphics that will eventually be sent to the machining department, where CNC and fiber lasers burn the design into the steel before Cerakoting.



This one-of-a-kind PPK is a tribute to Connery as Bond from 1962 to 1971, with the exception of a forgettable performance by George Lasenby *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in 1969, whereupon completion, Lasenby was advised by his agent that the Bond franchise would not continue to be a successful going into the 70s due to the hippie movement. Oops.

The pistol features iconic imagery from *Dr. No*, *From Russia with Love*, *Goldfinger*, *Thunderball*, *You Only Live Twice*, *Diamonds Are Forever* and *Never Say Never Again*, which was not shot by franchise creator Eon Productions and based on the previously released 1965 *Thunderball*.

Custom grip panels were made to expand the engravable real estate, giving us even more Bond goodness with two classic 007 Sean Connery portraits.

FOR EVERYONE'S EYES

This amazing tribute Walther PPK from Outlaw Ordnance is truly a piece of art and would easily find a place in any fan's collection. But, it must be displayed prominently because this pistol is definitely not *For Your Eyes Only*...

If you want a crack at winning this beauty, fix yourself a classic Bond martini and click on over to ballisticmag.com/win-walther. To see more work from the remarkable crew at Outlaw Ordnance or order a custom piece for yourself, visit them at outlawordnance.com.





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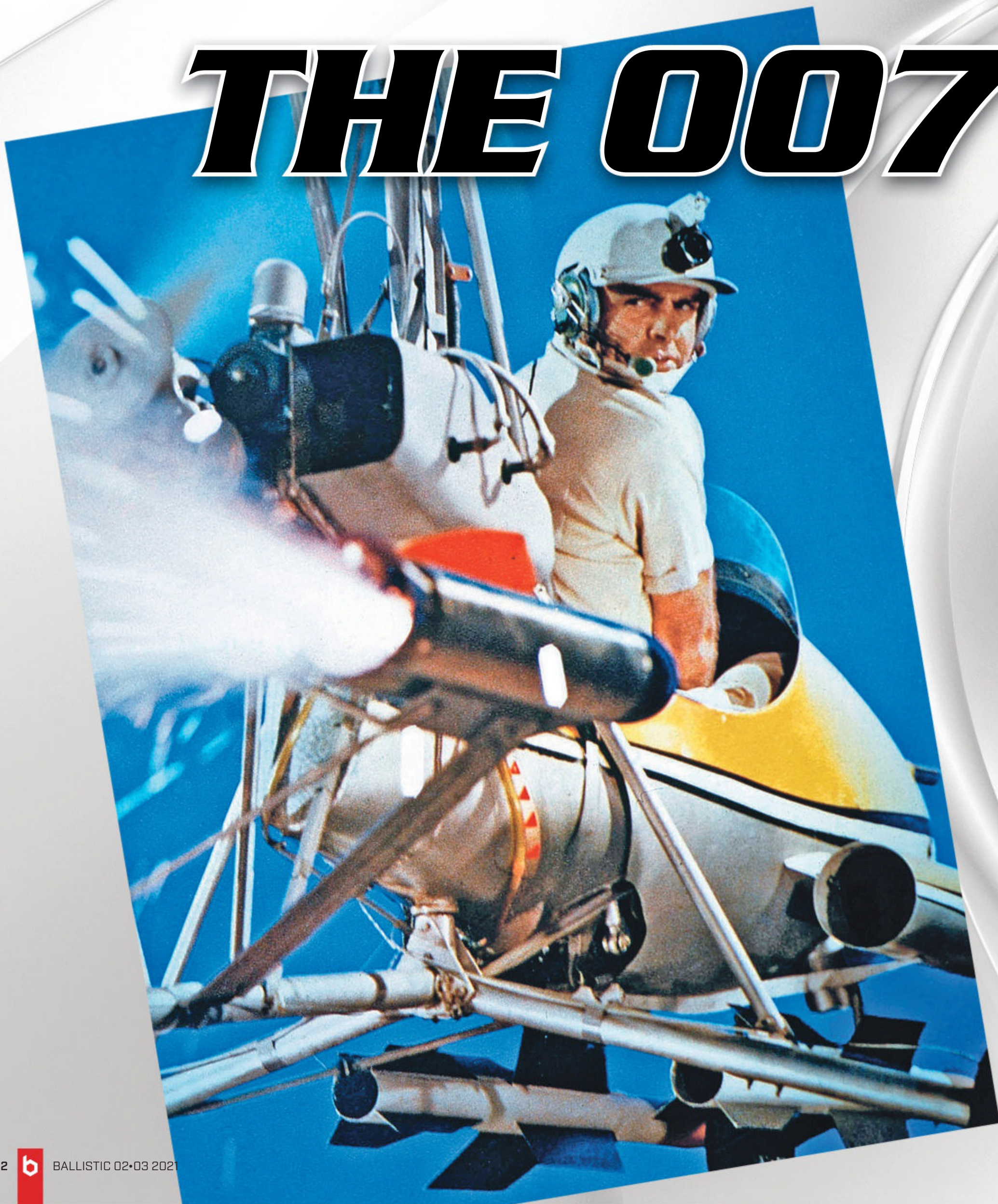
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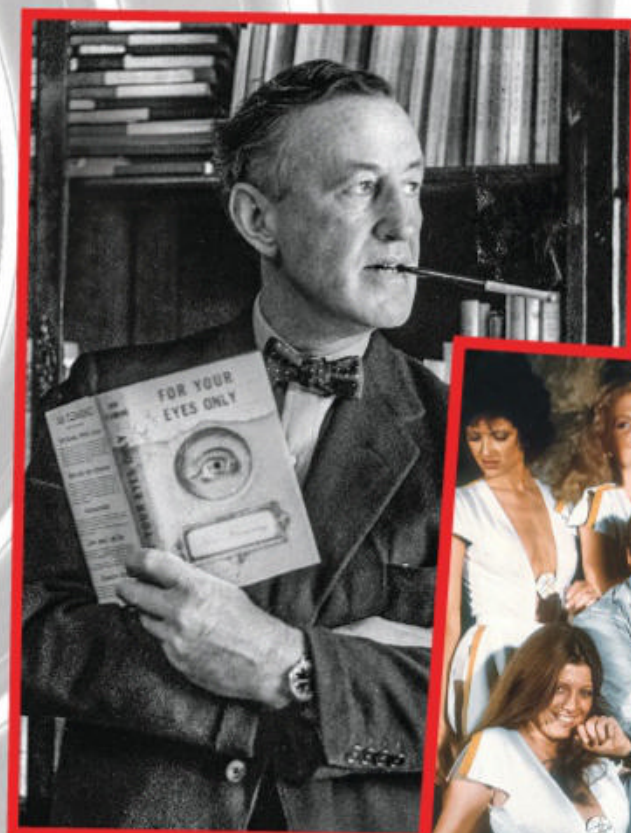
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FIND OUT WHETHER OR NOT YOU KNOW JACK ABOUT BOND, JAMES BOND

BY PETER SUCIU

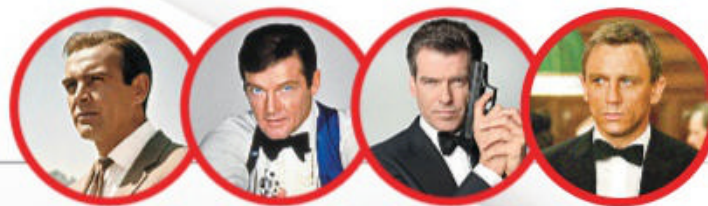
Throughout 25 “official” films, along with two non-canon movies, James Bond has become one of the most iconic characters in cinematic history. Even casual fans know what he drinks (a vodka martini, shaken not stirred); that’s he is quite the lady’s man who has had “relations” with more than 50 women; that some of the biggest names in pop music stepped up to provide the theme songs; and that the films remain eternally watchable.

While many of the stories might seem dated and some of the plots don’t always make sense, Bond is simply timeless fun. As one of those theme songs suggested, “Nobody does it better.”



Author Ian Fleming (top) must have certainly thought Bond was a lady’s man (right) and could get out of just about any kind of trouble (bottom).





Bond was provided a Walther PPK in *Dr. No*, and Sean Connery (center) and Roger Moore actually only used the PPK a couple of times on the big screen.

WALTHER PPK: BOND'S GO-TO GUN, OR WAS IT REALLY?

Just like Bond's drink of choice, most fans know the super spy carried a Walther PPK as his choice of firearms. However, that's not really true, as Bond doesn't carry the German-made pocket pistol nearly as often as one might think. In fact, in the original novels by British author Ian Fleming, Bond didn't start out with a Walther. Rather he carried a Beretta 418 until a reader contacted the author,

suggesting that the sidearm was really a "lady's gun" and recommended that the spy might carry a PPK instead.

The first film outing, 1962's *Dr. No*, actually addresses this in a way where Bond is forced to trade in his Beretta, which M said "jammed" during an off-screen mission, for a Walther PP chambered in .380 ACP.

The actual PPK didn't make its debut until the second Bond film, *From Russia With Love*. However, Bond wasn't quite taken with the handgun, as it wasn't even seen in *Goldfinger*. But by *You Only Live*

Twice, the handgun, which was developed for the German Weimar Republic's police, was so associated with the British agent that he was recognized for carrying it. And yet, the most prominence the gun is given is when Roger Moore's Bond faces off with *The Man With the Golden Gun*.

The PPK was retired the first time in the 1983 film *Octopussy* as Bond carries a Walther P5 instead, while in three of his outings Pierce Brosnan carried a Walther P99, which does seem to be a far more suitable firearm for a post-Cold War agent.

Then the Daniel Craig films saw a return of the PPK, likely to connect the latest movies to the past, but also to suggest he's somehow a relic of the Cold War for carrying it. Even then, it still seems an odd choice for a 21st century secret agent to be carrying a pistol that entered service in 1935!

As a side note, Fleming acknowledged the keen-eyed reader who suggested the PPK by naming MI-6's armorer after him. While the character is acknowledged as Major Boothroyd twice in the films, viewers know him simply as "Q."

THE BOND REMAKE: NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN

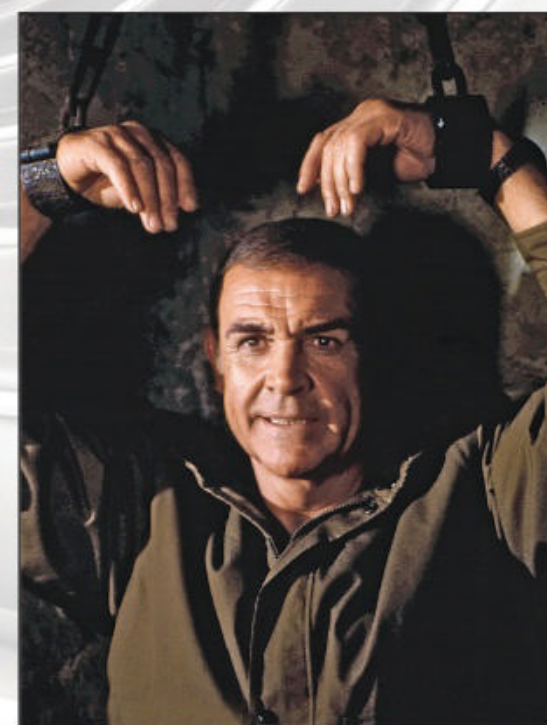
The 1983 Sean Connery outing isn't part of the official series, and it is essentially little more than an updated remake of the 1964 film *Thunderball*, which had been the eighth full-length Bond novel.

The backstory is actually more complicated than a super villain's sinister plan, and was actually the result of a long legal battle between Kevin McClory and Eon Productions over ownership of the source material, including characters and plot points.

This is because a few years before the first Bond film, *Dr. No*, was made into a film, McClory, along with three other individuals, collaborated with Bond's creator Ian Fleming about a possible film. Rather than working from one of Fleming's books, they created an original story that included numerous elements that were seen in several Bond films, including the secret criminal organization SPECTRE and its leader Ernst Stavro Blofeld. When the original effort to make a film failed to materialize, Fleming used those elements in his novel, which then led to the lawsuit.

When *Dr. No* successfully launched the film franchise, a deal was struck with McClory in which he became a producer on the film version of *Thunderball*. However, McClory retained the rights to the story and in 1983 made *Never Say Never Again* to compete with the official Eon Productions version. The title referenced Connery's vow to never play Bond again.

While it wasn't a blockbuster, the film did well enough that in the 1990s McClory announced plans to make a second remake, *Warhead*, possibly starring then former-Bond actor Timothy Dalton. The film never materialized, and when McClory died in 2006 it opened the way for Eon Productions to use the SPECTRE name in the films again—hence 2015's *Spectre*.



Sean Connery vowed after 1971's *Diamonds Are Forever* that he'd never play Bond again. *Never Say Never Again* marked his return to Bond in the non-canonical 1983 film.



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(Far left) While James Bond has driven many cars, his heart belongs to the Aston Martin DB5—seen here in the South of France in *Goldeneye* in a thrilling race against the film's femme fatale. (Left) Bond often had to make do with whatever ride was available, and that included a Citroën 2CV to escape a gang of henchmen in *For Your Eyes Only*.

BEHIND THE HOT WHEELS OF BOND

Along with the martini and the PPK, everyone knows Bond drove an Aston Martin. Here again, that's not quite on the bull's-eye. In 1962's *Dr. No*, Bond was behind the wheel of English-made Sunbeam Alpine Series II during the first car chase sequence in the franchise's history. He was seen with a Bentley Mark IV in the follow-up film *From Russia with Love*, where he is seen enjoying a picnic with Sylvia Trench—the

only “Bond Girl” to appear in two films (not counting Miss Money Penny and Judi Dench's M, of course).

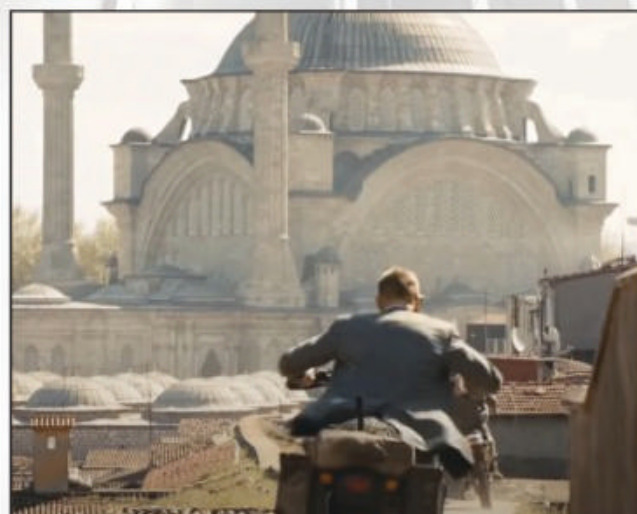
The Aston Martin DB5 only made its debut in 1964's *Goldfinger*, where its colorful accessories including ejection seat and machine guns are seen in use. The car appeared again in the pre-credit sequences of *Thunderball* the following year. Bond drives an Aston Martin DBS in the subsequent *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and it is in that car that wife Tracy Bond was killed by

main villain Ernst Stavro Blofeld and hench woman Irma Bunt. As Bond didn't have a car in *You Only Live Twice* we must assume Q was making the DBS ready for action. The DB5 wasn't seen at all during the Roger Moore era and only made its return in the Timothy Dalton outing *The Living Daylights*, while Pierce Brosnan's Bond was behind the wheel during the race sequence at the beginning of *Goldeneye*.

Interestingly, Daniel Craig's Bond won a DB5 from a villain during a card game in *Casino*

Royale, but he later used an Aston Martin DBS V12 in the film, while the DB5 (seemingly outfitted with gadgets) was seen in both *Skyfall* and *Spectre*.

At other points in the film series, Bond can be seen driving such cars as the Mercury Cougar, Ford Mustang, AMC Hornet, Lotus Esprit (which could drive underwater), Citroën 2CV and a BMW Z3. Bond even had an Aston Martin V12 Vanquish that was fitted with an invisibility cloak in the film *Die Another Day*—but that one is really best left forgotten!



THE GODFATHER OF JET SETTING

Coronavirus may have grounded travel, but in recent years everyone and their grandma has been trekking to what were once “exotic” locations. It is impossible now to go anywhere and not see once scenic cities overrun with tourists.

Yet, part of the early appeal of the Bond films was that in addition to getting the girl and driving expensive cars, he traveled the world. Long before people booked their vacation with frequent flier miles, Bond visited such cities as Istanbul, Venice, Amsterdam, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Cairo, Prague and Ho Chi Minh City. This is also what makes the early films fascinating to see. It is a time when people dressed to board an airplane, and there wasn't a Starbucks or McDonalds on every corner.

Sadly, while the secret agent might have been able to foil the evil plans of many a villain bent on world domination, even he can't stop the most remote corner of the planet from becoming yet another tourist trap, and in many ways the films have encouraged travel to those distant lands.

Of course, Bond has been to outer space, and in addition to saving the world he boldly did what no man has done in orbit.



No stranger to beautiful women, Bond has traveled the world, where he's “made friends” in India in *Octopussy* (top left), taken in the sights in Istanbul in *Skyfall* (above), and hung out with Michelle Yeoh off the coast of Vietnam in *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

NO TIME TO DIE HARDWARE

After being delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, James Bond finally returns to the big screen to face a terrorist who could be more dangerous than anyone he's ever encountered before.

In *No Time to Die* bond is retired from MI6 and lives a tranquil life in Jamaica. It has been five years since he captured Ernst Stavro Blofeld, the head of the sinister criminal syndicate known as SPECTRE, and the former spy struggles to deal with what it meant to be a "00" agent. He is then called back in service to search for a missing scientist while confronting a villain whose schemes could see the deaths of millions.

This 25th Bond film features Daniel Craig in his fifth and final outing as the British secret agent and once again has him jet-set-



ting around the world. While it maintains the grittier feel of past Craig films, it still delivers the action-packed sequences that have become the staple of the Bond franchise.

Bond once again carries the almost legendary Walther PPK, but 007 also wisely packs heat with a SIG-Sauer P226 during an assault on the villain's secret lair. The choice of weapons is quite a practical one, but also accurate given his background in the Royal Navy's Special Boat Service (SBS) as the P226 is the standard sidearm for the elite naval unit.

As a highly trained covert oper-

ative, Bond once again shows that he can adapt and competently use what is available and this includes such small arms as an AKS-74U, a Beretta ARX-160 A3 with GLX-160 A1 grenade launcher, an FN Browning Hi-Power and Mk18 Mod 0 fitted with an EOTech sight and suppressor. Super villain Saffin, played by Oscar winner Rami Malek, also uses a variety of firearms including a Czech Small Arms Sa vz. 58 Compact. The two men may have significant differences about the international political order of the world but they clearly share an appreciation of fine modern firearms.



And while far less gadget-focused than some past Bond outings, in *No Time to Die* the classic Aston Martin DB5 is still fitted with some notable "aftermarket" accessories—the most impressive of which is a pair of GE M134 Mini-guns mounted behind the headlights. Given the chance to take out democracy-hating villains, having a car pimped out with top notch weapons, traveling the world and always getting the girl—why would Bond ever want to retire?



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THE MANY FACES OF JAMES BOND

Perhaps only surpassed by political candidates, sports teams and favorite firearms is a topic about a “favorite” Bond so contentious. While Sean Connery has long been favored by baby boomers and Generation X has a penchant for Roger Moore, few seem to have much positive to say about Timothy Dalton, while Pierce Brosnan is now largely an afterthought. Likewise, Daniel Craig has remained a controversial Bond for lacking many of Bond’s traits. But, then again, along with the one-off George Lazenby, Craig was the only Bond to fall in love in one of the films. Maybe

some fans don’t like the softer side of the spy to be seen.

It could also be questioned whether any of the Bond actors actually fit what author Ian Fleming had in mind. He portrayed Bond as a tall, athletic, handsome agent who was in his late 30s or early 40s, and he had vices that included drinking, smoking, gambling and womanizing.

To Fleming, British actor David Niven came to mind as the perfect Bond. In fact, Niven did play Bond in the unofficial 1967 film *Casino Royale*, but it was actually an American actor who has the distinction of being the first screen-version of the spy.

Character actor Barry Nelson, who might be best remembered

for playing the hotel manager at the beginning of Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*, was the first actor to don a tuxedo and head to the *Casino Royale* in a live 1954 television adaptation of the 1953 novel. Instead of being a British agent, this Bond is an agent from the CIA (Combined Intelligence Agency), but it was Peter Lorre who was arguably the standout of the production as the villain Le Chiffre. Given that this was a low-budget production for the anthology series *Climax!*, it lacks the action that the Bond movies have come to be known for, yet it is actually among the most faithful to the source material and highlights the fact that Fleming’s work was really pure pulp fiction.



Peter Lorre was actually the first Bond villain in the TV production of *Casino Royale* on the Climax!



George Lazenby replaced Sean Connery for a single film in the Bond series, 1969’s *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*.

CASINO ROYALE REBOOT

The 2006 Daniel Craig Bond film *Casino Royale* “rebooted” the series in an attempt to make the “relic of the Cold War” relevant in a post-9/11 world. While it included ties to the classic Bond films, notably with Judi Dench playing M, it offered a new, more realistic and grounded version of Bond. The same couldn’t be said, however, for the 1967 version of *Casino Royal*, which was only slightly less campy than TV’s *Batman*.

The spy parody was only loosely based on Ian Fleming’s novel, and was made as a spoof of spy films, which were all the rage at the time. This was, of course, decades before Mike Myers created his “International Man of Mystery” Austin Powers character, but *Our Man Flint* and the Matt Helm series starring Dean Martin, had shown that successful spy spoofs could score big with audiences.

Casino Royale should have worked. It featured an all-star cast that included David Niven, Peter Sellers, Woody Allen, Orson Welles and even former “Bond girl” Ursula Andress—far bigger talent than actually appeared in the Eon Productions’ series. The story was pure nonsense, however, featuring a senior citizen Bond (Niven) returning to service to head MI6 and declaring “all” agents would be named James Bond 007 to confuse the villains (and possibly the audience). Allen played Jimmy Bond, nephew of Bond who is also the evil Dr. Noah. Five directors worked on the film, and it is hard to tell if they ever consulted one another. The result is far worse and more dreadful than it sounds, and the threat of being forced to endure repeated viewings would break even the hardest secret agent! ●



Largely forgotten, the 1967 *Casino Royale*, with David Niven (left) as Bond, makes the Austin Powers films seem like masterpieces. It also starred Peter Sellers, former “Bond Girl” Ursula Andress and Orson Welles (right). It was Barry Nelson (top) who played “Jimmy Bond” in the original *Casino Royale* in a TV adaption 52 years before Daniel Craig did the original source novel justice in 2006 (below).



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?



Oh well, that's what you call a modern-day, Bond-ready folding 9mm. There can be no question that this is something that could've come

straight outta Q's noggin. Meet the Zev Technologies (in partnership with Magpul) FDP-9 (Folding Defense Pistol). Word on the street is that Zev's FDP-9—the box gun that unfolds with

the push of a button—will officially start shipping in 2022. This is just a bit of a teaser. You'll need to cruise over to personaldefenseworld.com for more spy dope. — *John DeSpy*



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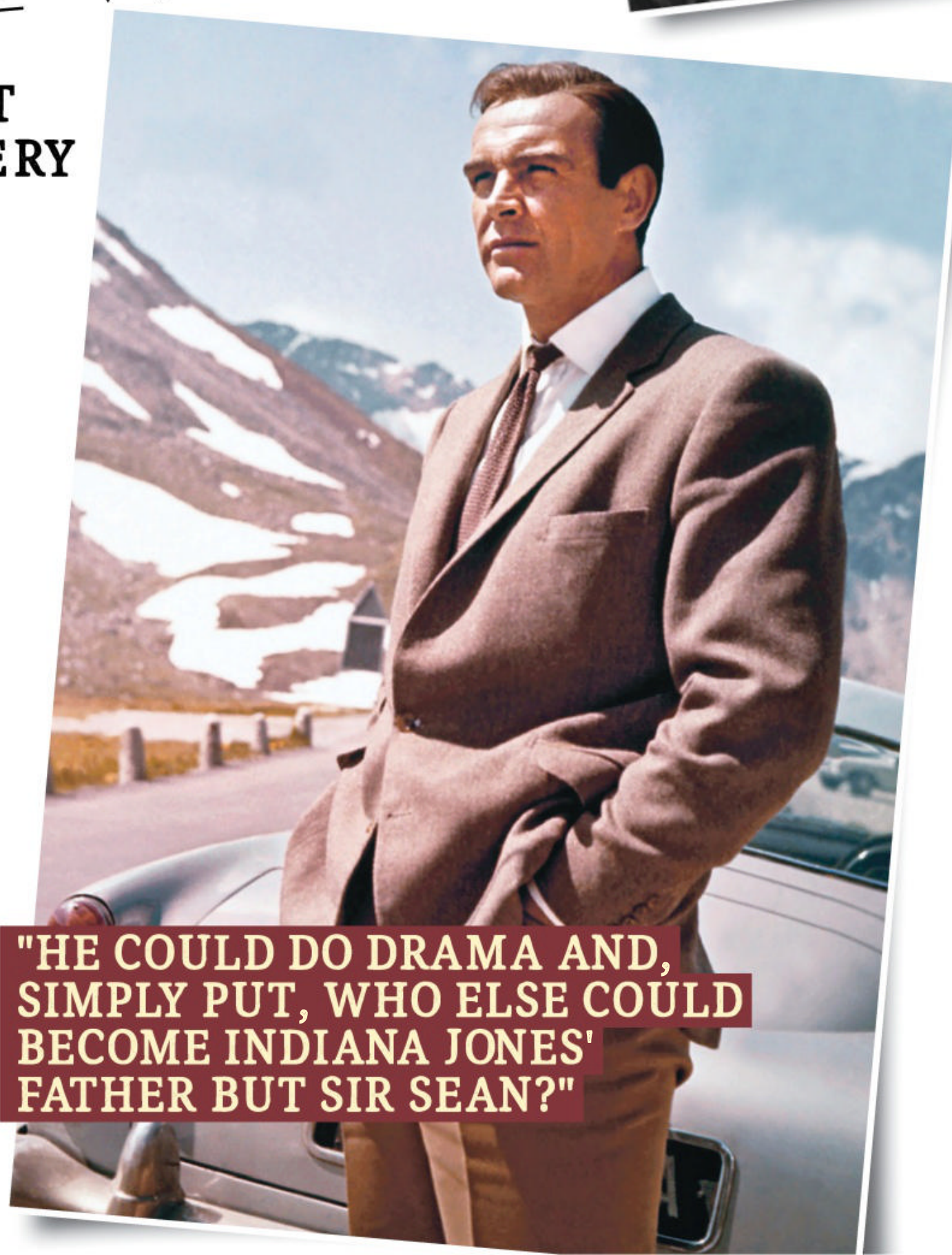
BY PETER SUCIU

While he might have been the best actor who played the British super spy, Sir Sean Connery was so much more than James Bond. In fact, he only played 007 seven times, and that's only if you count the non-Eon film *Never Say Never Again*. In a career that spanned six decades, Connery showed his range in nearly 60 other films and, unlike many "action stars," he never became a caricature of himself.

He struggled as an actor throughout the 1950s, and had it not been for Bond, the Scottish-born Connery might have been remembered for playing along "leprechauns" in the Walt Disney film *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*. However, that led to bigger things. And, in 1962 he was part of the all-star cast in the World War II epic *The Longest Day*, where he played a cocky British infantryman. The same year he starred in the first Bond film, *Dr. No*, and throughout the 1960s he simply was Bond and nobody did it better. Yet, before he could be typecast, he ditched the tuxedo and that's when he showed his range.



It wasn't always tuxedos and suits for Connery. He often donned uniforms including a British soldier in *The Longest Day* (right) and a Soviet submarine captain in *The Hunt for Red October* (below).



"HE COULD DO DRAMA AND, SIMPLY PUT, WHO ELSE COULD BECOME INDIANA JONES' FATHER BUT SIR SEAN?"



Connery, who served in the Royal Navy and reached the rank of Able Seaman, convincingly played military officers as he did in the Agatha Christie whodunit *Murder on the Orient Express*, and he was simply the perfect choice to portray Maj. Gen Roy Urquhart in another World War II epic, *A Bridge Too Far*. Yet, he could also play the far "less-refined" *The Man Who Would Be King* alongside Michael Caine, where two ex-sergeants of the British Army in the 19th century attempt to take over the remote land of Kafiristan.

During his lengthy career he played other kings and famous historic figures, including King Arthur, King Richard the Lionheart, King Agamemnon and even a Moroccan Sharif and the last of the Barbary Pirate Mulai Ahmed er Raisuni. Although the Scottish accent was often present, as it was when the Soviet submarine Captain Marko Ramius in the film version of Tom Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October*, he still made the roles his, and never did you just see Bond.

Connery was able to play criminals and law enforcement alike, and it was for his performance as a veteran Irish-American beat cop (with a Scottish accent) in the 1987

film *The Untouchables* that Connery won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. Of course, he had a few memorably bad roles that are best forgotten, including *Highlander II: The Quickening*, *The Avengers* and most infamously the sci-fi flop *Zardoz* (what should especially be forgotten is Connery's bondage-esque costume). Yet, despite a few bad choices, Connery remained an actor that could do it all. He could do action even as he got long in the tooth, he could do drama and, simply put, who else could become Indiana Jones' father but Sir Sean?

Whereas Connery was never a true "action star," he was still an actor who handled firearms realistically and believably. He may be remembered most famously for Bond's Walther PPK, but throughout his career he showed he could properly handle a Martini Henry, a Thompson M1928, a Bren Gun, a Colt 1911 and a Heckler & Koch MP5 among others.

Sean Connery leaves behind a film legacy that is simply unmatched. He was James Bond, shaken not stirred, but he was so much more. He also had no shortage of famous lines. Perhaps the best is from *The Rock*, "Losers always whine about their best. Winners go home and f*** the prom queen." ●

SEAN CONNERY IS JAMES BOND

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The MANY FACES *of* Mat BEST

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is much more than BRCC

BY ROBERT JORDAN

ALEX LANDEEN PHOTOS

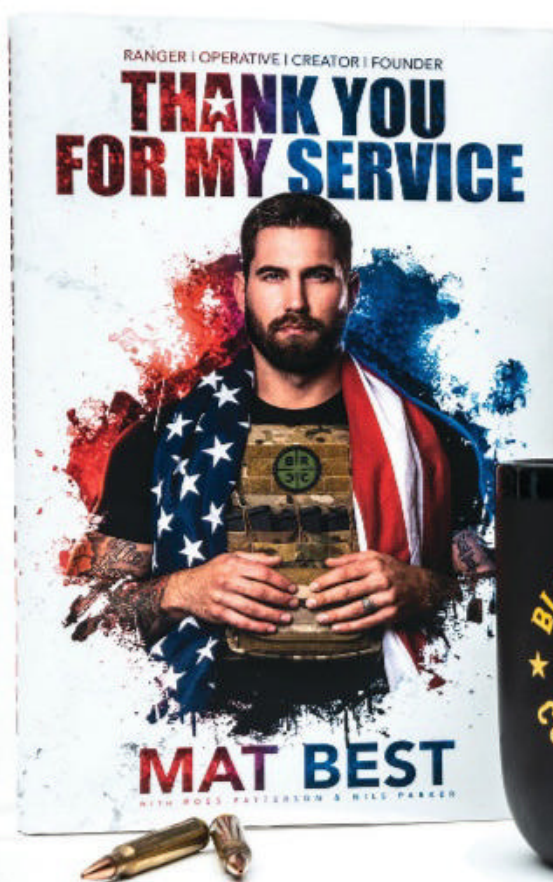


THE MANY FACES OF MAT BEST



We have likely all seen Mat's hilarious videos of spoofs on military life, Special Forces, guns, and coffee sprinkled with hot chicks in bikinis. If you haven't seen them, put it on your to-do list before the internet dictators yank them. And most of you know Mat is one of the co-founders of Black Rifle Coffee Company. And judging from the fact his book *Thank You for My Service* was on The New York Times Bestseller list, you very well may have read that too.

At 34 years of age, Mat was a member of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, fought extensively in the sandbox, helped start a wildly successful T-shirt company, a whiskey company, and now is the Executive Vice President for BRCC, which he co-founded with two other veterans. But perhaps his most important achievement was he escaped from the Communist Republic of California and relocated to eight acres of heaven near San Antonio, Texas. I needed to find out what made Mat tick, so



my trusty photographer Alex and I loaded up the truck and headed to Texas for a weekend of storytelling and mayhem with the heavily tattooed, dashing handsome, and slightly dysfunctional face of the modern U.S. veteran.

THE BEST SPECTRUM

Most of us have something we are especially good at. It might be grilling steaks or making a six-pack of beer disappear, but few of us have such a widely varied group of talents as Best. After high school, he joined the Army and then went through the grueling Ranger RASP School. He deployed to Iraq four times and Afghanistan once with the 2/7th Ranger Regiment. He wasn't in the rear with the gear. He fought insurgents and survived attacks. He lost friends and learned firsthand what war entails. Hemingway said, "There is no hunting like the hunting of man, and those who have hunted armed men long enough and liked it, never care for anything else thereafter." Best fell victim to the lure of war and returned for deployment after deployment. He eventually got out and tried a few other domestic endeavors, but soon went back as a contractor for OGA (Other Government Agency).

But even the adrenaline dump of war can eventually become mundane. Many become jaded, cynical and depressed when confronted with death on a daily basis. Others learn to make light of the worst situations. Ever meet an ER nurse or a highway patrolman who has seen countless vehicle fatalities? They all have a wicked, sick, twisted and unbelievably funny sense of humor. It keeps them sane in the midst of horror. Mat has that gift in spades. His humor helped him and those around him to adjust and accept the intense pressure of their situation. It helped to heal even those who didn't yet know they were hurting.

And it could have ended with that: a Sgt Ranger helping his buddies and then an OGA Team Leader guiding his team. But one day, Best did something stupid. He got online and read some posts of the over-privileged, self-indulging, social media-ites talking about how awful it was to be served lukewarm Frappuccinos or



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wait over seven minutes for an Uber, and he felt the same indignation and disbelief virtually all veterans feel when they can no longer relate to the masses back home. But, instead of internalizing it and hating these self-indulgent group of woke hipsters, he did the unthinkable: He wrote a song called “Champagne Facebook Problems,” recorded in a makeshift office in Iraq, and posted it to the internet like a true master of satire.

The world reacted. Best's first video resonated with all the guys and gals who spent time in the sandbox. They saw they weren't the only ones who could no longer relate to their peers back home. Best rotated back stateside and hooked up with a fellow veteran named Jarred Taylor who saw a kindred spirit in Mat's video shenanigans. Jarred had converted his entire house in El Paso into a movie recording studio. Before long, the two were cranking out videos that resonated with the ever-growing number of veterans who were coming back from the sandbox. Mat and Jarred soon decided to make a few funny T-shirts and sell them to supplement their income, and Article 15 clothing was born.

Range 15, the first movie to make *Blazing Saddles* look politically correct. 'Nuf said.

TOP RIGHT: A Marine smiling with a Ranger proves Mat can bring people together better than the Dalai Lama.



While all of this was going on, Mat was still deploying as a contractor for OGA. But everywhere he went, the soldiers were pushing past dignitaries he was guarding to get a selfie with the online personality they were beginning to love and revere. Mat's company tolerated a lot, but eventually, even he had to admit the time had come to leave the contractor life behind, immerse himself in his domestic success and see where it leads.

NEW CALLS OF DUTY

Before long, Best made a hilarious and completely insensitive movie called *Range 15*. Sidenote: if you find *anything* offensive, this movie is not for you! I peed myself laughing. With his buddies from Article 15 clothing, he founded a whiskey company called Lead-slingers and learned the only thing worse than dealing with federal government bureaucracy is dealing with 50 different state bureaucracies where you want to sell your whiskey. He was talked into being a co-founder of Black Rifle Coffee Company because everyone has known since the 1950s that mail order coffee is a growth business. And the former Emo/Punk kid from southern California sat and penned a tale about his life that overnight was a *New York Times* bestseller.

The funny thing about these ventures is statistically they are all virtually guaranteed to fail. But they didn't. A large part was simply the work ethic and Best's unwillingness to quit. No one told him starting a new business or

making a Hollywood movie or writing the great American novel were all fast roads to failure. Just like Ranger school, no one gave him permission to quit. So he didn't. He didn't emerge unscathed, but he did emerge successful.

Mat promoted the companies on YouTube and podcasts and personal appearances all over the world. But expansion and growth come with a price. He surrounded himself with the only people he knew and respected: fellow veterans. They made the same sacrifices he did for the common good. But he learned veterans have some of the same traits as the rest of us. While they all deserve our respect and thanks, some are lazy. Some are dishonest. Some will take advantage. Ultimately, they are human beings. As Mat grew up, he learned the world outside of war zones wasn't just rose petals, thick thighs and good vibes. As BRCC was taking off, some of his

other businesses were failing because there were people in leadership positions based on their time in the military instead of their ability to steer and develop. And Mat had to go from being everyone's friend to a businessman with standards and objectives. It was just one more progression for the man of so many faces.

BEST IN TEXAS

Spending time with him, you see the boyish exuberance and devil-may-care attitude has faded. He resents making tough decisions but acknowledges it is necessary to mature if he wants to keep business progressing and keep lots of good people—most of them are still fellow veterans—employed. But even now you will still see flashes of the younger, idealistic, exuberant Mat Best. He told us about an upcoming film shoot in a Bass Pro in the middle of the night where they were going to break

and destroy *everything*. They just had to clean up each morning so the store could open like normal. And he beamed about actually making a little money in the escapism of video games where he plays *Call of Duty* online and fans get to watch him and message him while he plays virtual special forces on TwitchTV. He still loves to pick up his guitar and belt out a funny song, make crass videos, down a little whiskey and raise a little hell. He just doesn't get to do it quite as much as he used to. The man who once picked up the severed arm of suicide bomber and used it to give his team "High Fives" for a job well done now has corporate meetings, public appearances and sponsorships to plan out.

So what happens next? After a full day of shooting photos, shooting whiskey and generally making a nuisance of ourselves ("No, Mrs.



BRCC cornered the market by recognizing the most important components of coffee: cleavage, flamethrowers, helicopters and rifles. Oh, and awesome coffee.



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THE MANY FACES OF MAT BEST



BEAN COUNTING AT THE BRCC



The Black Rifle Coffee brand strives to be synonymous with giving back. All employees are given paid time off to volunteer at almost any activity or charity event that helps active service members, veterans, first responders, people suffering from physical or psychological trauma, or simply a good cause. In addition, BRCC employees contribute money or merchandise to these organizations after they are vetted and known to be helping good people.

5,000: BRCC gave \$5K for a high school bass fishing initiative and money to an ER nurse whose house burned down while she was treating Covid victims.

750,000: BRCC donated over \$750K in 2020 alone, and that doesn't count the private donations from its three founding members (Evan Hafer,

Mat Best and Jarred Taylor) that went into 6 figures this year.

12,000: Evan Hafer gave \$12,000 to Heroes for Horses for veteran rehabilitation assistance.

75,000: Independent of BRCC, Mat Best and Eli Cuevas raised over \$75,000 for the Boot Campaign (Lace Up America!) through a streaming event.

128,345 (Lbs.): BRCC donated more than 128,345 pounds of coffee to service members, front line workers and nonprofit organizations—this equates to 6.1 million cups of coffee.

The actual list of contributions from BRCC and its members go on for pages, and keeping track of it all is almost impossible. But benevolence has never been a number. —Robert Jordan

Best, we didn't flip the RZR when we tried to ramp it over the bonfire. It was upside down and on fire when we got here."), I was finally able to pull Mat into his office with a couple glasses of Jameson and get down to business. The best thing about a self-made guy who started out with no agenda is no topic is off topic.

Mat listens to Colter Wall, Paul Cauthen, Death Metal and anything but pop because talent isn't restricted to a single genre. He doesn't have a five-year plan because he has never had a five-year plan. He writes songs with Tim Montana but claims he isn't ready to cut a solo album. Kids probably aren't on the horizon: "If it shits or pukes, I'm out!" And virtually every conversation comes back to one all-consuming passion: veterans.

WORTHY CAUSES

Besides his charitable work with BRCC, Mat is on the board of several non-profits, he donates huge chunks of his personal time, money and influence to worthy causes, and he has quietly bankrolled a number of veteran start-up businesses. When I pressed him to give me numbers of veterans that were helped, he couldn't, and with good reason. He doesn't care. It has never been about the numbers. For him, it is about the people. The people that are being helped are the point of the business. "All that matters is we are bringing people together. We are helping veterans. We are building an empire." Best's



The truly surprising part of BRCC is how amazingly good their coffee actually tastes.



passion is palatable, and no one could doubt his sincerity. It isn't about founding a Fortune 500 company. It is about talking to one veteran at a time and letting them know what they did was important, what they are experiencing is

normal, and where they can go from here is entirely up to them. Mat Best made it. Many of his buddies made it. And they want everyone else with a dream and a strong work ethic to be just as successful.

WORK ZONE AHEAD

Will Mat Best be the Steve Jobs of veteran owned start-up companies? Again, statistics says he is tilting at windmills. Start-up companies virtually always fail. But this man has no quit in him. "I grew up poor as shit in Santa Barbara, California. I can't sit still. I have this hole and entrepreneurship fills that hole. People want to criticize and everyone is in your business. I want to be better, and I won't stop. I will stay up later and I will put the work in."

As for me, I'll keep watching Mat's videos and I love his songs. But after the laughter dies and the moment fades, my appreciation will not. This is a man, coming from nowhere, funny as f#%, and human as the rest of us, who focuses on something bigger than himself. In an era of skepticism, cynicism and cancel culture, it almost seems unthinkable. If you are looking for me, I will be in the cheap seats rooting and cheering and hoping and helping. I hope you will join me. Better yet, I hope you will join him. ●

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EXCOMMUNICADO

IT'S RIDE OR DIE TIME



here's a contract on your head, and the entire underworld wants you 10 toes up. Legendary assas-

sin John Wick is at your six, revving the engine of his 1970 Chevy Chevelle SS. The passenger door is open, and the invite expires as soon as the blood dries on his No. 2 pencil.

As you make your way to the car, British secret agent James Bond descends from the sky in a jetpack as he remotely controls his Aston Martin with his wristwatch. The car rolls up with a gorgeous woman in the passenger seat. 007 gives her an approving smirk as she exits the car, leaving the seat warm and the martinis chilled. You have exactly 10 seconds to decide who is your ride or die—not figuratively, literally.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FAMILY—OH, WAIT...

Bond and Wick are both orphans and widowers with no children, which makes for some pretty depressing small talk on the open road. Wick loved his wife, Helen, so much that he paid off his “blood-oath marker” with

the Russian mob to be with her in her final days. She died of cancer not long after that, leaving John a beagle puppy named Daisy to care for. Unfortunately, Daisy was beaten and shot to death by a wealthy Russian mobster named Iosef Tarasov. Of course, this led to a shitstorm of epic proportions.

Bond's wife, Tracy, was killed on their wedding day in a drive-by shooting. Bond never did care for a pet, but he slept with a woman named Pussy Galore, so we assume that he is a cat person. Ms. Galore was a competent henchwoman and one of the few “Bond Girls” who actually escaped death. The MI6 secret agent has had sex with more than 55 women, and 33 of them were murdered shortly afterward. To some, this might raise a few red flags. But, when you're an international man of mystery, you never let feelings get in the way.

ADVANTAGE: BOND

We all know that you should never let emotions influence how you fight. Plus, spouses always seem to be a weak link in spy movies. You gotta love 'em and leave 'em if you want to survive in this game. Hats off to Bond for “Keeping the British end up.”

PICK YOUR
PARTNER,
JOHN WICK
OR JAMES
BOND? BY
JASON
SWARR





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RUSSIAN MOB VS. HER MAJESTY'S ROYAL SERVICE

Wick's background is pretty vague, but we do know that he was raised by the Ruska Roma crime organization and later worked for the Tarasov family. Those are some pretty big names on that LinkedIn resumé. He also has "Fortis Fortuna Adiuvant" tattooed across his back, which is Latin for, "It is only the strong ones that the Goddess of Fortune comes to save." That's definitely way more hardcore than that Chinese kanji tattoo on your ankle, but hey, if you say it translates to "Lone Wolf," then I believe you. Wick is a homegrown master assassin who has racked up a kill count of around 300. If you are keeping score, those aren't rookie numbers. That is a buttload of dead bodies for only three movies.

When Bond wasn't skiing in the French Alps or sleeping with more hot women (starting to get jealous here), he earned credentials in every assassin and spy skillset known to man. After running shit as a commander in the Royal Navy, he was hand selected by MI6 and earned the coveted "00" rating. That means this dude is straight-up "licensed to kill" by the British government. Some highlights from his resumé include underwater warfare expert, advanced commando training, HALO

parachutist, special forces qualification, master of all weapons systems, and proficient to pilot any aircraft or submarine in existence. Last we checked, he has killed 597 bad guys in 26 movies. That's about 22 funerals every time this dude steps onto the silver screen.

ADVANTAGE: WICK

Bond might have all the cool-guy school credentials under his belt, but Wick grew up in the Russian mafia. You



Almay Photo

can't substitute tea and crumpets with slitting your neighbor's throat at age 9 because your "Uncle Viggo" didn't like the smell of his breath. Bond may have attended the School of Hard Knocks, but Wick is the f***ing principal.

X-RAY GLASSES AND BOOZE

When it comes to social settings, these two are polar opposites. John Wick consistently keeps a low profile, hates large gatherings and pays for everything in untraceable gold coins. However, his taste in liquor is exquisite. His drink of choice is Blanton's Bourbon, which can run about \$400 a bottle for the good stuff. And when it comes to gadgets, Johnny plays no games. It's all about the weapons of opportunity.

On the other end of the spectrum, James Bond drinks Vesper martinis (shaken, not stirred) and walks into any room with swagger and charm. Thanks to the British Secret Intelligence Service, he's got an unlimited budget as well as the coolest spy gadgets ever built. Even Wick would be envious of Bond's arsenal. His toolbox includes jet-packs, cigarette darts, dagger shoes, spiked umbrellas, ski-pole guns, X-ray glasses, folding sniper rifles and throwing knives, to name just a few.

IT'S TIME



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ADVANTAGE: TIE

While shark guns and personal hovercrafts are at the top of any man's Christmas list, these crazy gadgets require lots of training. Plus, if your Moonraker laser gun misfires, you have a lot of explaining to do to the boss lady (and whoever's face you just melted off). Wick keeps it simple. (If he can't kill you with a pencil, is it really worth carrying?) This is all about personal taste. Look in your safe at home. If your AR-15 has more accessories than a Mars rover, then you might be a Bond guy.

WHO NEEDS FRIENDS WHEN YOU HAVE WEAPONS?

There are only two people who are truly loyal to Wick: the concierge Charon and the crime-scene cleaner Charlie. Charon is the first face you see when entering the Continental, a five-star hotel strictly for assassins. He's got class, style and a vast weapons collection that would make any gun enthusiast pee their pants. Then



there's Charlie, a professional cleaner who disposes of bodies and restores blood-soaked murder scenes to their original condition. He's reliable, does A+ work and would definitely receive an outstanding Yelp review if "Murder Maids" were a category.

Bond, on the other hand, has the entire British Secret Intelligence Service on his side. His support team consists of "Q," a gadgets and inventions guru and quite possibly the greatest small-arms expert and armorer in the world. He also has "M," the head of MI6, and her secretary, the sexy and flirtatious Miss Money Penny. In every city he steps into, he has a contact there to help facilitate his needs.

ADVANTAGE: WICK

In the immortal words of Joseph Stalin (I can't believe I am even quoting this turd), "I trust no one, not even myself." Too many friends, too many contacts...eventually someone is going

"BOND NEVER DID CARE FOR A PET, BUT HE SLEPT WITH A WOMAN NAMED PUSSY GALORE, SO WE ASSUME THAT HE IS A CAT PERSON."

to turn on you, especially when they see that you own a jetpack. That's just plain arrogant, and almost anybody would be jealous as hell. To survive in this game, you must be able to count your allies on a single, bloody hand.

FAST AND FURIOUS

Wick is all about American muscle, and he puts these beauties to the test! He drives a 1968 Dodge Charger, a 1969 Mustang GT, a 1970 Chevelle SS 454 LS6 and a 2011 Dodge Charger LD. While Bond has to rely on wit, class and charm to get the ladies, all Baba Yaga has to do is mash the pedal a few times and the panties start to drop.

Bond, however, is all about luxury super-mobiles. He drives the Aston Martin DB5, the Aston Martin DBS V12 and the Aston Martin V12 Vanquish. These British speed demons have been known to top out close to 200 mph and go from 0 to 60 in under 5 seconds. They are perfect getaway cars for when you have metal-mouth malefactors chasing after you or when you notice that another one of your 55 girlfriends has just died.

ADVANTAGE: WICK

Look, as much as I like to go fast and listen to Wham!, I bleed red, white and blue. Nothing compares to the sound of an American muscle car lined up at a red light with its engine revving and a driver ready to burn 2 inches of rubber off the tires just to show up that Prius in the next lane over. It's what we've done since 1776!



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YOU WANT A WAR OR JUST WANNA GIVE ME A GUN?

When your nickname is “The Boogeyman,” you’d better be packing some kickass weapons. Wick’s go-to pistols are the Glock 26, an STI 2011, the Kimber Warrior and a Heckler & Koch P30L. Of course, there are numerous other firearms that have found their way into his hands, but I will let you go back through the three films and pick them out for yourself. In fact, calling out Wick’s firearms as he uses them before any of your friends do is a killer drinking game!

While most people instantly associate 007 with the Walther PPK, his original choice of firearm was the intimidating Beretta .25 automatic. OK, I made you laugh there. Not sure why one of the top agents in the world would carry such a girly pistol, but I never graduated from international spy school, so I will just keep my comments to myself. Bond also rocked certain firearms for different missions. He even broke out Dirty Harry’s gun (Smith and Wesson’s Model 29 .44 magnum) in *Live and Let Die*. So, just because he digs the pocket rockets, doesn’t mean he won’t end your life with a hand cannon.

ADVANTAGE: WICK

One of the biggest lies that I have been told in my life is, “It’s not the size of the boat, it’s the motion in the ocean.” Yeah, right. Nice try, ladies. Big guns equal big holes in people. I have seen a crackhead get shot 14 times with a .380 and still be able to run away. That’s not happening with a .45, my friends. Plus, Wick’s gun-handling skills are far superior to our British secret agent’s. Looks like all those precious range days at Taran Tactical have finally paid off.

SPY VS. ASSASSIN

007 is that highly trained operative you send in to seduce the gorgeous, blonde diplomat

and then steal the nuclear launch codes on the way out. He can eliminate threats with poison blow darts across a crowded black-tie event, and then he will sip on a martini or play a \$500 hand of baccarat as his victim lies there tits up. If you want it done discreetly and with class, Bond is your man.

But if you need to shoot 25 m*****f**ers in the face to save the world, then you might want to pick John Wick for your team. Except, if that is your mentality, the joke is actually on you since there is no “team.” Wick is in charge, and you will simply hide in the trunk in the fetal position until he has finished the job. Be nice, pay the man and go about your business.

TIME’S UP

So, if I were faced with this choice, whose vehicle would I get into? While both men are more than qualified to save my ass, my gut tells me that John Wick is the man for the job. Bond’s tactics are definitely cunning and impressive, but as my grandmother used to tell me before our annual family reunion, “Sometimes, extreme violence is the answer.” ●



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BY FRANK MELLONI

3I HOLSTERS

What do you do when your go-to holster maker is talking about closing up shop? Buy 'em! At least that's what veteran Scott Frank of 3i holsters did in 2016. It was in this move that we see the Marine Corps mindset of "Improvise, Adapt and Overcome." Under the new ownership, 3i continued its one-of-a-kind custom Kydex work and even expanded the business far beyond the original barn-based factory. The key to this small business' success is that they simply make holsters like no other, which is quite a feat in the sea of "custom Kydex" companies. Each piece is made to the specs set forth by the customer, allowing for custom-colored eyelets, colored or custom-printed Kydex and dual-layer effects that are unique to 3i. Functionality customization is delivered through multiple belt-loop options, light or red-dot accommodations and any other custom cuts or forms that are required to hold a modified pistol perfectly. 3i's mission statement is simple: Create unique and functional holsters that serve CCW holders, competitors, law enforcement and any other responsible gun owner.

My first exposure to 3i was through my teammates on Team Tuff. One by one, they started posting photos of these super slick-looking speed holsters that were still production legal in USPSA. Each holster was made to their particular gun and matched both it and their shooting jersey. Immediately interested, I decided to challenge



Scott and the boys with a request for a custom lefty rig for a Walther PPQ. What came my way simply blew my mind, as it not only decreased my draw time but delivered a completely different retention system that was match legal and completely adjustable. Later on in my career, they provided me a left-handed IWB holster for Mossberg's new MC1 handgun, a first of its kind. 3i keeps its finger on the pulse of the industry, thus is lightning fast when it comes to building gear for

new releases. Coupled with a lifetime warranty, it's no wonder the company stays on the cutting edge of Kydex holster production.

3i also makes one-off holsters based directly off of a customer's gun if it is so rare that there simply isn't a mold for it. Through this methodology they also make handcuff holsters, knife sheaths and protective carry rigs for whatever you can dream of, to wear any way you can possibly imagine. For more information, visit 3iholsters.com.

1791 GUN LEATHER

Plastic is fantastic, but there is no substitute for good old American leather. Hey, if for no other reason, consider leather carry gear just for the smell! Named after the year the United States signed the bill of rights, 1791 Gun Leather has one mission in mind: Crafting top-quality leather goods for law enforcement, veterans, first responders and patriots alike. Founded in 2015, this gun-leather company is gaining some serious recognition for its products.

At the top of its product line sits the Gun Belt 01. This heavy-duty rig starts life as a piece of full-grain American heavy native steer hide. It is cut from the top layer to ensure it is of the utmost quality and rigidity. Aside from the initial tanning and perhaps a little dye to help create a jet black finish, the material is largely untreated. This keeps its original texture and stiffness, which is exactly what you want in an article that is supporting a gun. Stiff belts keep your pistol where it belongs and won't flex during a draw. That little bit of extra time when a thin dress belt will slide up with your gun could very well be the difference between life and death when the chips are down. This belt ensures that your gun will break clean from the holster, putting a little extra confidence into your concealed-carry setup.

Aside from top-quality belts that don't cost an arm and a leg, 1791 makes some other unique leather gear that serves a variety of gun owners. Their Ultra-Custom holster is the world's first moldable leather rig that boasts the comfort of leather, yet the retention of Kydex. Equally notable is the Fair Chase line, which is made with ethically harvested American whitetail deer skin for a uniquely soft concealment product that is almost a little too nice not to show off. While you are tucking things away, the Snag Mag magazine holster is built to sit right in your pocket and cleverly disguises itself as a pocket knife. These products alone illustrate 1791 is not "just another leather company," but the four generations of leather artisans are not through yet. Keep an eye on these folks for some big releases in 2021! For more information, visit 1791gunleather.com.





FAST



FN

FN's New 509 LS Edge Takes The Avid Shooter To The Bleeding Edge Of Performance

BY GARRETT LUCAS



The new 509 LS Edge is a blend of features from both competition and advanced fighting pistols.



If there's any firearms company name that's synonymous with hard-use duty weapons built for the rigors of war, that company has to be Fabrique National

Herstal. Or, as most gun owners know it, FN. Since 1889, FN has produced a vast range of iconic small arms ranging from the original Browning Hi-Power and SCAR battle rifle to more substantial systems like the M249 light machinegun and the .50 BMG M2 "Ma Deuce" machinegun. Also charged with manufacturing rifles such as the M4A1 for the U.S. military, FN supplies the majority of the small arms used by our soldiers, sailors and marines.

One of FN's latest projects is the FN 509 series of striker-fired pistols that was designed as an entrant into the U.S. military's Modular Handgun Trials. Multiple variants have been released including compact and subcompact models, as well as optics-ready models and tactical versions ready to rock a suppressor. However, FN's latest offering, the 509 LS Edge, takes performance to the next level with a package suitable for both tactical applications and competitive shooting.

EDGING TOWARD EXCELLENCE

While most of FN's modern pistols in the FNS, FNX and 509 series have been geared toward duty use for military or law enforcement

personnel, the 509 LS Edge was designed and built with competitive shooting in mind. Though it retains the 509's hell-for-stout build quality, the LS Edge offers up a few extra features to make it race-day ready.

The "LS" stands for the longer slide and is probably the pistol's most distinguishing feature. Housing a 5-inch, cold hammer-forged barrel, the slide offers a longer sight radius than the standard model and is quite attractive in its own right. Featuring a graphite PVD finish, angled lightening cuts and a tapered front end, the LS Edge's slide definitely has a sleek and sexy race-gun quality about it.

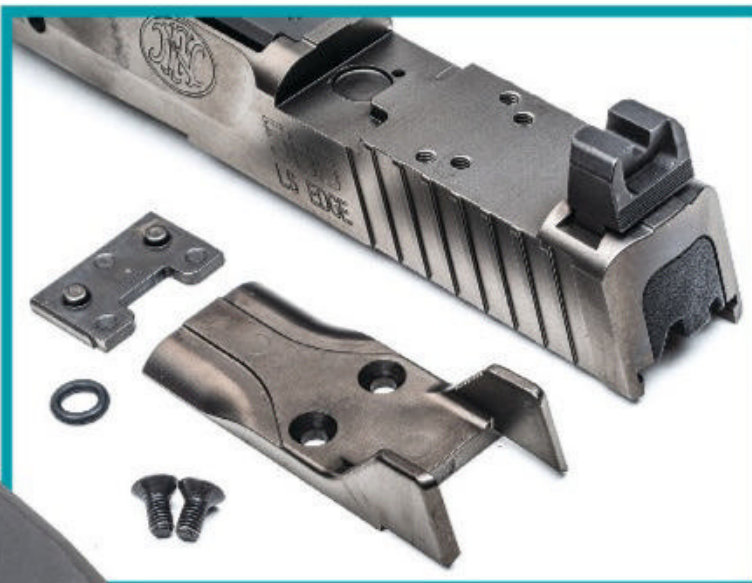
Adorning the slide up front is a dovetailed fiber-optic sight, which is suppressor height, though there's no threaded barrel for a suppressor. At the rear is a blacked out and serrated sight with a fairly narrow notch for precise aiming. That rear sight is flanked on both sides by metal "ears" to protect sight alignment, and those ears feature texturing on the front ramps to facilitate one-handed racking off of things like a belt, boot, table or the like.

While not unique to the LS Edge, the pistol does offer FN's superb (and patented) low-profile optics-mounting system for a variety of the most popular red-dots. These include the Trijicon RMR/SRO, Leupold DeltaPoint Pro, C-More STS2, Burris and Doctor optics, and a variety of Vortex optics. The metal ears flanking

FURIOUS



Alex Landeen Photo



When you remove the slide cover plate, the protective ears go but the iron sights stay in place for co-witnessing.

SPECIFICATIONS

FN 509 LS EDGE

CALIBER:	9mm
BARREL:	5 inches
OA LENGTH:	8.2 inches
WEIGHT:	31 ounces (empty)
GRIPS:	Polymer
SIGHTS:	Fiber-optic front
ACTION:	Striker-fired
FINISH:	Graphite PVD
CAPACITY:	17+1
MSRP:	\$1,499

the rear sight are integral to the slide cover plate. If you remove the plate, the ears go with it. The good news is that the rear sight stays in place for co-witnessing with the red-dot sight.

What I like about FN's optics mounting system, in contrast to other manufacturers, is that all the hassle and confusion is taken away from the process. FN supplies an organized package of screws and plates along with an easy-to-follow diagram to mount the optic of your choice.

New features unique to the LS Edge include an enlarged, reversible magazine release and a flat-faced, polymer trigger. The triggers on other 509 variants are of the curved-and-hinged variety, and the flat-faced trigger definitely changes the feel of the 509's trigger operation. Maybe it's the geometry involved with the new trigger's pull, but the break felt both lighter and crisper than other 509 models I've shot.

After trying the trigger, I put a call into the folks at FN about the LS Edge to see if any extra work had been done. I found out there was indeed some refinements to the Edge's fire controls. The trigger breaks at 90 degrees and the conical striker has been redesigned to reduce the pull weight by approximately 1.5 pounds. I measured the break on my Lyman digital gauge and the break weight averaged right at 4.65 pounds.

This in itself is lighter than other 509s I've tested, but the flat-face trigger makes it feel even lighter than that—at least to me, and

Like all 509 pistols, this new offering from FN is easy to take down and requires very little in the way of maintenance.

Alex Landeen Photo

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1. The LS Edge includes ample controls for left-handers, including the reversible mag release and ambi slide stop.
2. A suppressor-height, fiber-optic front sight finishes off the front end of the graphite PVD-finished slide.
3. Protective ears, integral to the slide cover plate, help protect rear sight alignment.

that's a subjective observation. At first, there was some take-up grittiness near the wall before the break, but that cleaned up after a short time on the range.

Another race-gun feature, though also useful for tactical work, is a slightly flared aluminum magazine well for quickly seating the three supplied 17-round mags. Sporting the same finish found on the slide for a complementary accent, the magwell is nicely done. It does its job in facilitating easier mag insertion without being obnoxiously large. It's affixed to the grip frame via a setscrew in the front-strap, so if the user wants to change out the backstrap for one with a better fit, the magwell has to be removed first.

Other features of the LS Edge include the "frame perimeter" grip texturing, which is new and provides a rock-solid purchase on the pistol, though it's not terribly different from the original texturing. Along with the reversible mag release, there's an ambidextrous slide stop/release as well. The LS Edge also sports

the Picatinny accessory rail, polished chamber and feed ramp, a cold hammer-forged barrel and a recessed barrel crown—all of which are found on all other 509 pistols.

RANGE OBSERVATIONS

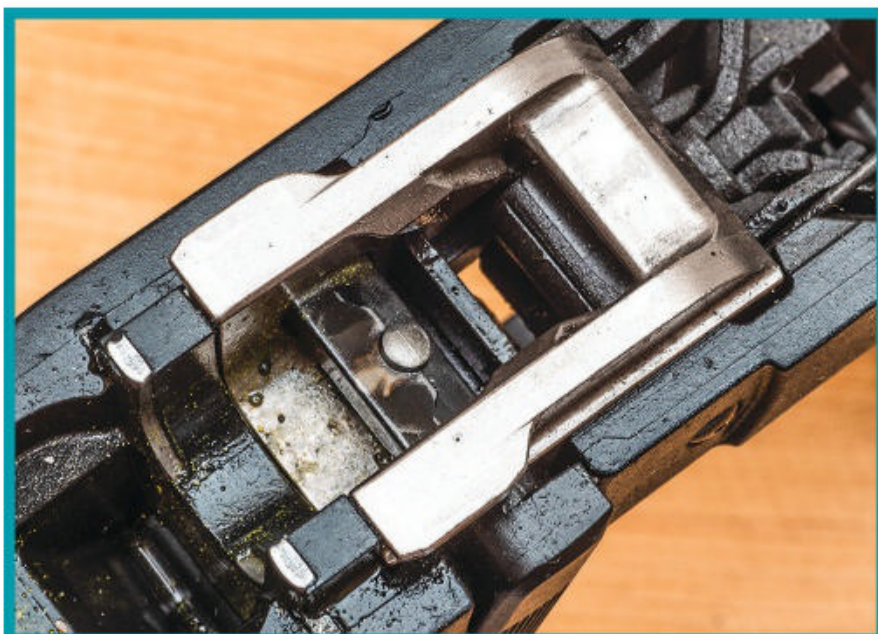
Unfortunately, because of shipping delays and a tight deadline on this new-to-market pistol, I couldn't get a red-dot optic to use on it. However, I've used FN's optics-mounting platform a few times in the past and it's without question the best mass-produced option in the business. And while we've used pistols for a couple of hundred years without red-dot sights, there's no question that they help with more precise aiming when testing from the bench. At least they help me and my tired eyes, but a couple of friends and I made a go of it anyway with the LS Edge.

Reliability with the 509 LS Edge was superb, as usual. Whether shooting drills with range ammunition or checking accuracy with premiere loads, there wasn't a single

malfunction. It also hit me that through the years of reviewing various FN pistols including the FNS and FNX lines, as well as various 509-series pistols, I don't think I've had a single malfunction.

In the case of the LS Edge, the accuracy was also just as excellent as its reliability. I've experienced exceptional accuracy with both the 509 Midsize and the 509 Compact MRD as well, so this is nothing new. At 25 yards from the bench, sub-2-inch groups were quite common with loads from Sig Sauer, Federal and Hornady. The best five-shot group measured just 1.25 inches and was achieved with Sig's 147-grain Elite V-Crown. Curiously, I had several groups with four shots covering just 1 inch, but the fifth shot would open up the group to somewhere in the 1.75- to 2-inch range. It's hard to know if it was me or the one-shot flier syndrome at work, but those results were still pretty dang good.

The only complaint I had with regard to accuracy was that the suppressor-height



FAR LEFT:

Like its brethren, the 509 LS Edge is robustly built for hard use in service or on competition day.

LEFT:

With the 509 LS Edge's fairly flat recoil impulse, the shooter was able to get on target quicker for accurate follow-up shots.

sights seemed way off in their regulation. Every group shot at least a couple inches to the right, which is easy enough to correct by adjusting windage. However, +P loads were hitting 6 inches low at 25 yards and standard pressure rounds were still 3 to 4 inches low for the most part. The Sig 147-grainers got me closest to the point of aim. If you're rocking a red-dot, this wouldn't be much of

an issue since you can dial in your elevation. But, if you're just running irons, it might be a little trickier to get on point with your preferred load.

The 509 LS Edge was an extremely nice shooter, even with the hotter +P loads. Thanks to the extra weight up front and the superb grip texturing, we were able to manage the recoil impulse quite handily. It didn't have the

utterly flat impulse you get with race guns of all-steel construction, but it was fairly close.

The enhanced trigger was definitely an improvement over previous 509 models and contributed to the excellent offhand results I achieved at various distances. One 10-shot group was fired offhand at 15 yards in just 8.7 seconds and had a span of only 3 inches. I didn't set any land speed records with that

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SINCE 1977



ABOVE: The extra-positive frame texturing locked in the shooter's grip for excellent recoil control.

LEFT: The best five-shot group from 25 yards was 1.25 inches and was shot with Sig Sauer's 147-grain Elite V-Crown ammunition.

PERFORMANCE

FN 509 LS EDGE

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
Sig Sauer 147 Elite V-Crown	902	1.25
Sig Sauer 124 Elite V-Crown	1,199	1.64
Federal Premium 124 +P HST	1,255	2.18
Federal Premium 124 Hydra Shok	1,118	1.52
Wilson Combat 124 +P GDHP	1,151	1.96

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in fps by chronograph and accuracy in inches for best five-shot groups at 25 yards.



group, but I wasn't exactly taking my time with it either. The point is, because of the Edge's handling and weight I was able to get back on target quickly with fairly precise follow-up fire. The trigger reset wasn't the shortest I've experienced, but it wasn't bad either. It had a positive, audible and tactical pop when the reset occurred and didn't hamper rapid shot strings.

The user interface of the 509 LS Edge was first-rate as well. The pistol was quick and easy to disassemble, and controls like the slide stop and the magazine release were generously sized for easy activation without being obtrusive. The weighted, aluminum baseplates on the magazines helped with quick Wick-flips to jettison the mags while the aluminum magwell assisted with confidently fast reloads. Throw into the mix a much-improved trigger group, and the LS Edge was an immensely satisfying pistol to shoot.

GETTING THE EDGE

There's an expression about something being more than the sum of its parts, and for me, that's an apt description of the 509 LS Edge. It blends the best features of a tank-tough fighting pistol with the sleek lines and enhanced interface of a competition pistol. But that sum also adds up to an MSRP of \$1,499. That puts it in the same territory as high-end race guns with all-steel construction, and all-steel guns tend to command a higher premium.

In some ways, the 509 LS Edge is a bit of a hybrid platform. Billed as the "ultimate tactical fighting pistol" by FN, the Edge sports a number of features that make it a competition-ready pistol. However, with the polymer frame, the user gets the benefit of a lighter weight for easier mobility within defensive or tactical applications and for all-day carry. It all comes down to the end user's tolerance for the price-to-performance ratio.

Whether you're looking for the best optics-mounting platform on the market, high-end race gun features that augment the shooter's abilities or a no-compromise fighting pistol that yields outstanding results, the 509 LS Edge has it all. It's a top-tier offering that commands respect and definitely deserves your attention. For more, visit fnamerica.com.



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**Falkor's
new CSS
takes sub-MOA
accuracy and
smoothness
to the max**

CLASS

ACTION

BY SEAN UTLEY



We typically begin these reviews slowly, with statements or contemplative questions meant to draw you into the subject matter. This time I won't do that. I'll just say outright that Falkor's CSS bolt-action rifle is one bad mother.

That's not to say that it is without faults, because it's not. However, it is still on bad mother.

How did I come to this conclusion? Well, it's simple. I've shot the gun a bunch. And others around me have shot the gun, too. We all came to the same conclusion: The action—deemed the 7EVEN—is friggin' awesome. It feels amazing. It's fast, smooth, robust and easy. Yeah, other companies have done it, but few companies get it right so early in their mission. We should all be thankful that Falkor took this task so seriously from the outset, for this rifle is a great addition to the bolt-action market.



QUALMS FIRST

Let's just put this out there right now to balance out the aforementioned goodness. The chassis, in my opinion, is the weak link. Sorry, but it's true. It *is* my opinion though, and I'm kind of finicky about certain attributes of firearms. The CSS chassis is cool-looking, and yes, that matters to many people. But, here's my take. It's only specific parts of the CSS chassis that I'm not fond of, and it may never be an issue, depending on how you plan to use your rifle. The area where the forend connects to the receiver portion of the chassis has a weird curve in front of the magwell that I feel isn't necessary. I think about placing the chassis on a bag for barricade/positional shooting and imagine this portion creating instability. It probably doesn't do that, but that's what I see. Regardless, the forend is substantial, with plenty of M-LOK slots for weights or other accessories, and it's scalloped, allowing the Nightforce ATACR with 56mm objective to snug up nice and close to the barrel.

The CSS also features an AR-style folding buttstock and a pistol grip. I've never loved that on a bolt-action rifle. And there is a spring-loaded monopod on the bottom of the stock. The issue here is that the surface area is too narrow, so the support it provides isn't ideal, and the narrowness of the stock causes the rear of the rifle to sink too easily into a rear bag.

Those are my personal complaints. Love me or hate me. Are they deal breakers? Not by a longshot! But the action is so good, and the rifle's so accurate and so easy to shoot, that you have to really wonder about the "less-than-stellar" aspects.

Now, to counter what I just revealed, I'll tell you that we awarded the Falkor CSS Ballistic's Best bolt-action rifle of the year in 2020, in spite of the aforementioned drawbacks. And it had some serious competition. The CSS won because it was truly a standout among standouts.

AMAZING ACTION

You can't have a bolt-action rifle without the action, and the 7EVEN has that special something. Out of the box it's smooth—not buttery smooth but mechanically practical smooth. And you can tell that in a short period of time it's likely to nearly run itself. The bolt lift is easy, with enough tension to know you're



The CSS stock is highly adjustable. Thanks to M-Lok attachment points, the 7EVEN rifle can be fitted with many accessories.





"You can't have a bolt-action rifle without the action, and the 7EVEN has that special something."

SPECIFICATIONS

**FALKOR DEFENSE
7EVEN**

CALIBER:	6.5 Creedmoor
BARREL:	26 inches
OA LENGTH:	38.5 inches
WEIGHT:	10.5 pounds (empty)
STOCK:	Chassis
SIGHTS:	None
ACTION:	Bolt
FINISH:	Cerakote (FDE)
CAPACITY:	10+1
MSRP:	\$4,250

The bolt is fluted to keep things running smoothly, even in adverse conditions, and features changeable bolt knobs.

doing work, but once it's in motion it almost completes the process for you. And when you return it home, the lockup feels almost automatic and pneumatic. Running the action on an empty 7EVEN doesn't tell the story. You must run rounds through it to truly appreciate it.

With ties to the aerospace industry, a certain level of process efficiencies and quality control must be reached, and Falkor has done that. As you may have imagined, the action has the Remington 700 footprint, is machined from pre-hardened 416 stainless and features a wire EDM-cut raceway. These are often attributes of well-made actions. Two lugs on the 4140 chrome-moly bolt lock up tight with a 90-degree throw. Flutes are etched into the bolt to improve reliability in the elements. The M16-style extractor is excellent, and thanks to the plunger-style ejector, the 7EVEN tosses spent cases with ease and force—no limp ejection port dribbling here. It's push feed, and you can also change out the bolt knob if you desire.

The recoil lug is integrated—always a plus—along with the Picatinny rail up top, which comes with 20 minutes of angle. The bolt stop is a vertical version instead of horizontal. There are some shooters who absolutely punish bolt stops like they owe the operator money, so this should help alleviate issues. With evidence of several bolt-actions nuking over the past couple of years, it's nice that Falkor included two safety gas ports at the 9 and 3 o'clock positions. I think we assume that bolt-action rifles can't blow up. That's not the case, and sadly few bolt gunners wear eye protection, but I digress. Maybe this safety feature will save an eye or two, should an expedited loading session produce a detrimental round.

STRAIGHTJACKET BARREL

No stranger to the shooting world, the Dracos StraightJacket Barrel makes its way onto the CSS bolt-action rifle. This barrel system is an interesting one, featuring a Bartlein rifled core surrounded by a lightweight composite, and protected by an aerospace-grade aluminum outer jacket. The result is a strong, lightweight barrel, and one that can withstand, if not ward off, heat. This ideally will result in longer strings of precision firing with a bolt-action rifle.

There is some interesting information on the performance of the Dracos in full-auto testing on the company's website. If it's legit—and I

"I added a Nightforce ATACR 7-35mm with H59 reticle to the CSS to complete the total, badass package."

have no reason to believe it's not—then we should all be running such barrels on our bolt-action rifles. Other claims include reduced barrel whip and extended barrel life due to reduced heat.

I've had limited experience with the Dracos barrels. I've had some that didn't shoot all that well and others that shot lights out, like the one on this particular CSS. I do like the Dracos concept, especially when you shoot 15 to 20 rounds of 6.5 Creedmoor with little pause and place your hand on a barely warm barrel. But for this evaluator, the jury is still out on placing full confidence in it. I should note that I feel the same way about carbon-fiber-wrapped barrels as well. But again, this rifle is capable of noteworthy precision.

OTHER PARTS & PERFORMANCE

A good rifle still needs other bits and pieces, including a quality trigger and optic. Falkor went the way of TriggerTech, placing the Diamond on board. A crisp break and lack of lag from creep further adds to the precise nature of the CSS. I added a Nightforce ATACR 7-35mm with H59 reticle to the CSS to complete the total, badass package. The result is a bona fide hammer that's easy to swing.

You know what I like about standardized testing? It's standard. You know what I don't like about it? It's standard. You won't find any long velocity charts here. The only velocity we



pulled was for Hornady's 140-grain ELD-M. It zipped along at 2,766 feet per second from the CSS and produced groups of 0.4 inches and better. I believe it's a 0.25-MOA rifle with the right shooter. But all of us who shot it shot 0.5 inches or better, even new-to-bolt-action shooters. I'm sure there are other brands of ammo that can produce similar results, and once you buy your CSS you'll have fun figuring out which one is best—assuming you can even find ammo.

We shot the CSS from 100 yards to over 1,000 yards, and it did it all well and right. My friend Kendl is new to bolt-action rifles, and she consistently placed hit after hit on an IPSC target at 1,080 yards and drilled 8-inch plates

at 516 yards during a training session, where she was tasked with leaving her shooting position to retrieve a fresh round to shoot, for five rounds. The purpose of this drill is to help bring repetition to building a solid shooting position. With the adjustability of the CSS stock, Kendl found the perfect fitment formula. Spotting impacts is easy on the CSS rifle too, thanks to the ACE muzzle brake installed on the Dracos barrel.

CONCLUSION

The CSS rifle is a great example of what can be accomplished in product design when the approach is taken seriously and when multiple sources are researched. Falkor reached out to the shooters in the community to help shore up their design. Falkor has a history of making serious, and accurate, high-quality rifles of the gas type. Now they can add bolt-action rifles to their pedigree.

The CSS as a whole isn't perfect, but it's so good that it won't take much to bring it closer to that threshold. The selling price is \$4,250, and while that's not a drop in the bucket, I do believe the overall results justify such a price. I believe it will be a one-rifle buy and serve the owner well for years and barrel changes to come. For more information, visit falkordefense.com.

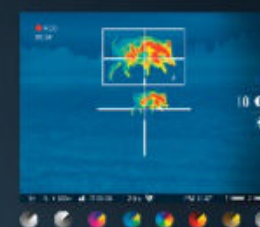
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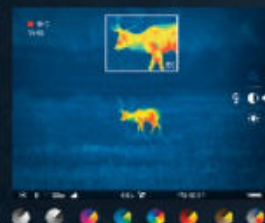
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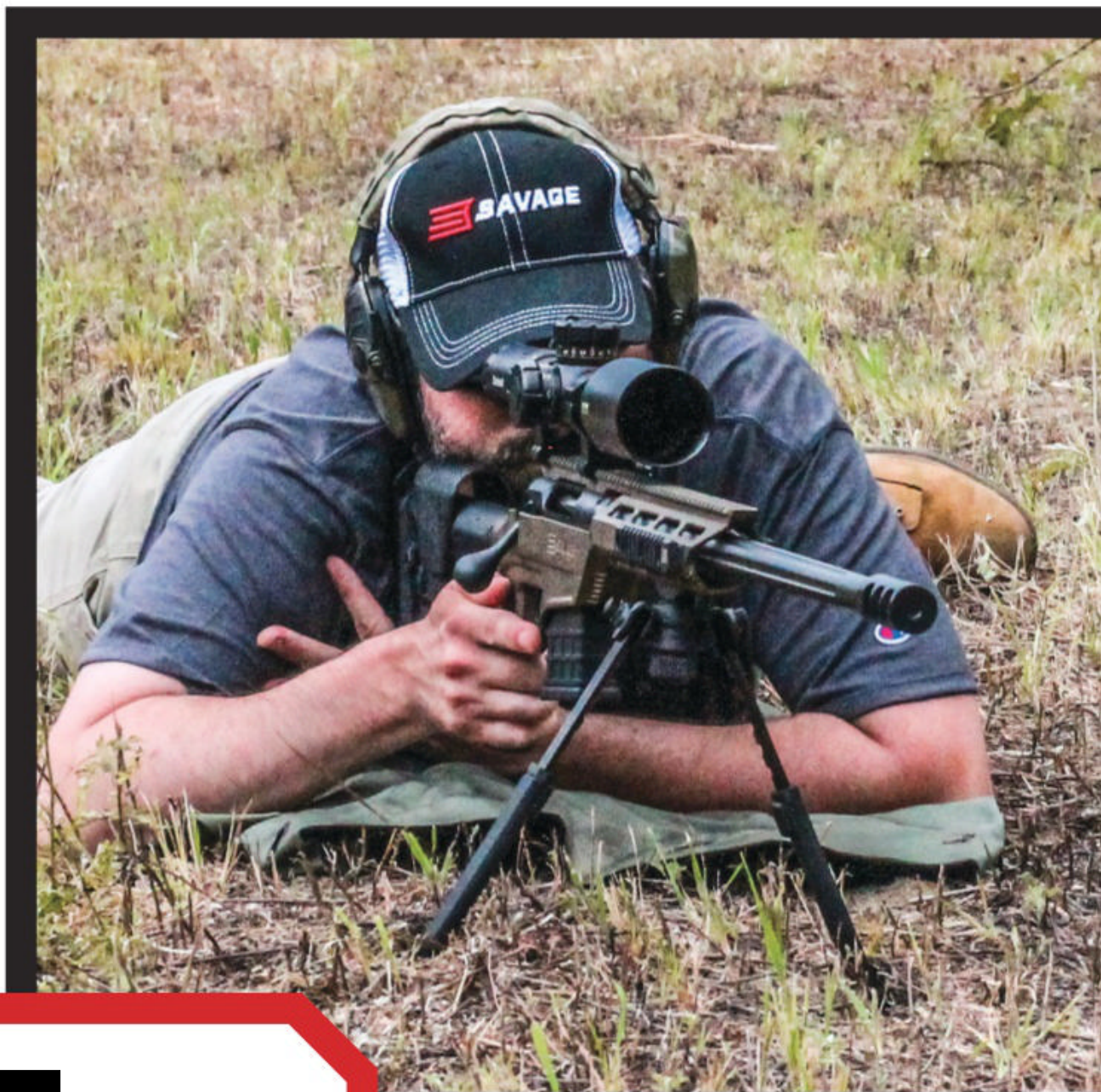


Last year I had the good fortune to attend a long-range shooting class at Peace-maker National Training

Center (PNTC) in Gerrardstown, West Virginia, taught by its lead instructor, Wade Shambaugh. I'd spent some range time with Shambaugh before, and the man is a shooter of the highest caliber, as well as one of the best instructors I've ever met. But I was for certain a long-range novice, having never shot beyond 500 yards, either at a target or an animal.

The first time I shot with Shambaugh, I witnessed him double-tap a steel target at 1,000 yards in 3.43 seconds with a bolt-action rifle he'd just touched for the first time that morning. The rifle was a Savage Stealth Evolution chassis gun in 6.5 Creedmoor shooting factory ammo and topped with a Bushnell Elite Tactical DMR II 3.5-21x50 scope. To a carbine and

Getting your center lined up with the rifle when shooting prone keeps the bulk of your weight behind the gun, helping soak up felt recoil.



GRIP IT & GRIP IT

SIMPLE TIPS ON BEARING DOWN ON LIGHT RIFLES TO SHOOT LONGER AND FASTER

BY GEORGE McNEIL

brush gun guy like me, this was, and remains, an impressive feat.

Though much of the class I attended a couple of months later was a rehashing of advice he'd already imparted to me on the range, there was one aspect Shambaugh emphasized that went against much of the precision-rifle shooting advice I'd been given in the past. Yet his way works far better for me in almost all shooting scenarios.

BETTER TO BEAR DOWN

"A lot of people tend to treat long-range shooting like benchrest shooting," Shambaugh says. "When you have a heavy rifle with an excellent trigger, firing a small, low-recoil cartridge, certainly it's best to interact with the rifle as little as possible to press the trigger, letting the weight of the gun do most of the work of keeping things stable.

"But when you're shooting a relatively light rifle chambered for a high-velocity,



The three fingers on the shooting hand pull the rifle hard into the shoulder via the pistol grip, while the thumb rides along the side of the receiver and the trigger finger remains loose.

harder-recoiling centerfire cartridge, you can't treat it the same way and expect to stay on target or get quick follow-up shots," Shambaugh adds. "When folks shoot like that, you can tell, because their rifle will hop around on the bipod with the recoil after every shot. Then what happens is that they have to acquire their sight picture in the scope all over again. Sometimes they lose the target altogether and have to back out their magnification to find it."

To keep your target in your scope so you can both watch your hit on the steel—or lack thereof—and be ready for a quick follow-up shot, Shambaugh recommends bearing down on the rifle.

He keeps the thumb of his right hand riding along the right side of the receiver, and not wrapped around the grip of the rifle, which is almost universal for precision shooters. This kind of grip prevents your hand from torquing the pistol grip during the trigger





“HE KEEPS THE THUMB OF HIS RIGHT HAND RIDING ALONG THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE RECEIVER, AND NOT WRAPPED AROUND THE GRIP OF THE RIFLE...”

press—especially important for shots beyond 800 yards, when the slightest twitch at the rifle can send your shot way off target.

He then uses the middle, ring and pinky fingers of his right hand to pull the rifle into his shoulder as hard as possible while still remaining comfortable.

“You don’t want to pull in to the point of muscle fatigue and trembling, but you want it tight,” Shambaugh says.

At the same time, he leans into the gun with his body weight, heavily loading the bipod or shooting bags under the rifle’s handguard.

“This lets everything stay as still and tight as possible, with the only thing moving being your trigger finger and the trigger,” Shambaugh says.

On a bolt gun, keeping the rifle tucked in tight and using your weight to help mitigate muzzle rise and recoil hop greatly aid in keeping the target in the scope through firing and cycling the next round.

Even with a great spotter, it’s far easier to correct your shot placement if you can see

your hit. And that means keeping the target in your scope through the recoil.

With a semi-auto, doing the same makes follow-up long-range shots lightning fast.

PUTTING IT IN PLAY

Does it work? Well, it worked for me. I went to PNTC with the aforementioned brand-new chassis gun in 6.5 Creedmoor that we chronographed and sighted in at 50 yards. We had a sub-MOA group within six rounds, and Wade had me breaking personal bests and hitting steel at 1,000 yards with the factory Federal loads and a Kestrel before I’d fired a dozen shots.

That’s all fine and good, and amazingly, what you should expect from a solid chassis rifle with a great barrel and a good optic these days. But next, we made our way to PNTC’s variable distance range, where we had to dial up to odd distances and deal with shooting downhill and through wind swirling around among small hills and hollows downrange that we couldn’t feel at all from the firing line.

I got on an AR, also chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor, and got off the bench to put Shambaugh’s advice to work shooting from a tank trap.

I wrapped myself around the gun and pulled it in, while leaning on it as much as I could, the way I’d been taught. Once I ranged it and dialed up the scope, that 665-yard gong was mine for 7 out of 10 shots on the first magazine, and then 8 of 10 on the second.

On the third mag, for some reason, I lapsed back to wrapping my thumb around the pistol grip on the second magazine, and started missing. Wade tapped my shoulder, and pointed at my thumb. I fixed my grip, and started hearing impacts again.

After that, getting back on the bolt gun on a bench and ringing a 975-yard target with some decent mirage wasn’t intimidating at all.

The point is, pulling back and leaning in while using a proper grip and executing a good trigger squeeze will get you over damn near all the hurdles in the way of making those long shots, and making them quickly, as competition, and sometimes hunting scenarios, demand. ●



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I'm the luckiest guy I know. I scored a wife who is way out of my league. I grew up dirt poor on a Midwest farm and I ended up traveling all over the world on the government's dime. And nowadays gun manufacturers send me all kinds of cool guns to shoot and test, and they even pay me to write up my opinion. And I never got blown up while I was in Afghanistan. Trust me, I'm pretty lucky.

So I was excited to be included in the fourth annual Athlon Outdoors Rendezvous held near Driggs, Idaho, and to have the privilege of meeting one on one with approximately 30 leading manufacturing companies to talk about their new



products, their histories and the directions their companies were going.

On the third day of shooting, talking, hanging out, telling stories and blowing up Tannerite, the writers were treated to a surprise. Magnum Research had brought along something special: a massive BFR revolver in .44 Remington Magnum with walnut grips, hexagon-fluted cylinder and octagonal barrel with "Athlon Outdoors" engraved on the cylinder. They drew a name out of a hat, and yours truly won. As a bonus, they even engraved "Robert Jordan" on the top of the barrel before they sent it to me. I told my wife she had to sleep on the couch because my new gun needed a soft place to lie close to me.

BIG & FINE.44 MAGNUM

Winner, winner
a Rendezvous Custom
BFR dinner

BY ROBERT JORDAN • ALEX LANDEEN PHOTOS





BIG & FINE .44 MAGNUM



Magnum Research prides itself in craftsmanship that ensures the fit and finish of every part of the BFR is perfect. The author's revolver certainly lived up to that very lofty quality standard.

calibers. These include .30-30, 300 Blackout and even .50 Beowulf, among others. I once shot a BFR in .500 Linebaugh for another gun review. They say that round separates the men from the boys. When I was done shooting it, I hiked up my short pants, trotted my happy butt home and asked Momma for a "lolly," 'cuz I did not want to shoot it ever again.

Magnum Research's website allows you to literally design your own BFR, from caliber to barrel length to grips to cylinder profile and a lot more. The Athlon Revolver, as we came to call it, is an example of one of those custom pieces. And judging from the Athlon Revolver, and Magnum Research's fantastic customer service, you can probably personalize it even more if you have some ideas and give them a call.

BACKGROUND

Single-action revolvers are a far cry from the polymer pistols I carry daily as a federal law enforcement officer. I grew up on a small farm in southwest Kansas. I carried a single-action .22 revolver for a week every spring when I walked the cattle fence, driving in staples that had fallen out over the previous year, while my dad drove the pickup ahead and stretched the barbed wire. From the time I was eight years old, I shot anywhere from one to 10 rattlesnakes every year. Sometimes I saw them first, and sometimes they saw me. I must have gotten pretty good (or lucky), because I never was bitten. I used to practice my fast draw with an empty gun in the living room. We had a Hunter brand holster with some fancy engraving on it.

I would apply neatsfoot oil to the holster every year to keep it from cracking, snap it on my belt and tie down the bottom around my leg. I wore out three of those cheap single-action .22s before I left home for college. No handgun has ever felt so natural in my hand. It is almost as if Samuel Colt's design came from heaven above, and no design after will match it.

But my BFR was no .22. Even the renowned quick-draw Bill Jordan said the .44 Magnum was a bit too much gun to handle

SPECIFICATIONS

MAGNUM RESEARCH AO CUSTOM BFR

CALIBER:	.44 Remington Magnum
BARREL:	4.9 inches
OA LENGTH:	11 inches
WEIGHT:	3 pounds, 2.2 ounces (empty)
SIGHTS:	Iron, adjustable
ACTION:	Single-action
CAPACITY:	6

HISTORY OF THE BFR

Magnum Research was started in the late 1970s. However, it wasn't until the early 2000s that they began making the BFR (Biggest Finest Revolver or Big Frame Revolver, depending on who you talk to). The design wasn't simply a copy of the classic Colt Single Action revolver. This is a proprietary single-action design made for the largest pistol calibers and even some rifle calibers. You don't have to put it on half cock to rotate the cylinder and load or unload it. You simply swing open the loading gate, and this lets the cylinder turn freely. Opening the loading gate also locks the hammer so you cannot cock it. The BFR comes in short cylinder for normal pistol calibers, and in long cylinder for traditional rifle



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BIG & FINE .44 MAGNUM



A Leopold FX-II 4x28 scope assisted the author in shooting some amazing groups at 25 yards with the BFR.

enjoyably, but he never fired a BFR. The BFR is *big*. All that steel does a wonderful job of sucking up that .44 Magnum recoil. Sure, it still has some muzzle flip, but no one ever cries after they shoot it. I first got some A-Zoom Snap Caps and started practicing my dry fire around the house. It was like traveling back to my youth.

Then I realized I needed a good holster. I called up Joby Goerges at Magnum Research and asked him who makes the best holster for the BFR. He didn't hesitate, and told me to contact Diamond D Custom Leather in Alaska. I talked to Mike Barrett at Diamond D about how I needed a good drop-leg holster. He explained that the BFR is a heavy pistol (over 3 pounds, for my gun) and that I might like a chest rig better than a hip holster that pulled my pants down. I love it when I get sound advice from someone more experienced and knowledgeable than I am.

I told Mike I was worried a chest rig would interfere with my bino harness when I was hunting, but he assured me that it would sit lower and they would work fine together. I ordered the holster and waited impatiently for it to arrive. It was worth every minute. The craftsmanship was amazing, and it fit the gun perfectly without any neatsfoot oil or shoe wax or break-in. The perfectly spaced stitching, buffed edges and comfortable design were the perfect complements to my beautiful BFR.



PERFORMANCE

MAGNUM RESEARCH AO CUSTOM BFR

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
CCI Blazer 240 JHP	1,084	1.66
Federal 240 Fusion Soft Point	1,399	1.70
Hornady Custom 240 XTP	1,419	1.62
Hornady Handgun Hunter 200 MonoFlex	1,296	0.63

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second by Doppler radar and accuracy in inches for best five-shot groups at 25 yards.

RANGE REPORT

I contacted Hornady, Federal and CCI for ammunition for test firing the BFR. Ammunition sales have gone crazy, but each company provided what they could. I switched out the crisp, adjustable iron sights for a scope mount from Magnum Research and mounted a Leupold FX-II 4x28mm handgun scope for testing accuracy.

On a beautiful morning at the CowTown Range just north of Phoenix, Arizona, I set up my LabRadar on my shooting bench and settled in for a few hours of testing. I never tested a gun that felt so perfect in my hand. I was giddy just shooting the BFR Athlon Revolver on this quiet range. The scope worked great, and the 25-yard groups were incredible. One group measured a stunning 0.63 inch. After the accuracy test, I removed the Leupold scope and re-installed the iron sights. I strapped on the Diamond D holster and started practicing as if I was being run down by a grizzly while hunting elk in Montana. That grizzly never had a chance.



The Diamond D Custom Leather chest rig proved well-made and very comfortable.

THE TAKEAWAY

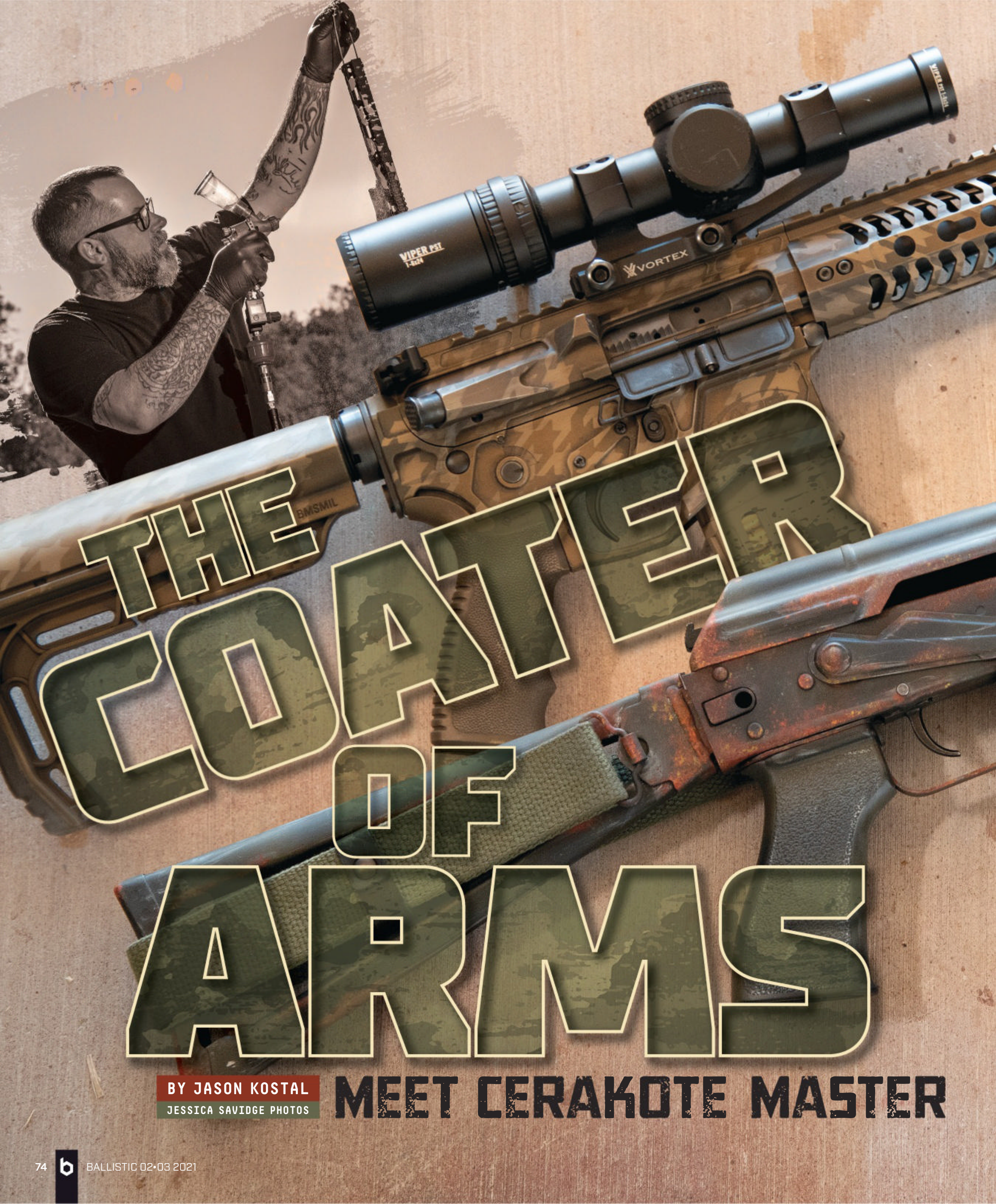
I fully expect some people will read this article and simply not understand. I normally write about modern tactical guns and equipment. I talk about cutting-edge technology and protecting your life with the best tools available today. This article isn't written for everyone. It is a homage to my youth, and those of many people who grew up in simpler times and simpler conditions. It is a tribute to the single-action revolver and the natural beauty it conveys. It is an endorsement of how good that platform can be with a company like Magnum Research using the finest modern CNC machines, the best steel and cutting-edge design to produce a true work of art like the BFR.

I apologize if this isn't my normal description of how to equip yourself for the modern gunfight. This article wasn't for you. It was for me. And it was for everyone who yearns to hold and shoot the finest manifestation of a classic today.

For more information on the BFR, visit magnumresearchcustoms.com.

FALKOR DEFENSE

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Firearms finishes have been an important part of the manufacturing process since their earliest development. The process of browning, or russeting, predates firearms as a way of protecting iron and steel by causing the material to rust and then forcing that process to stop. The end result reduces glare and also helps prevent the metal from rusting in the future. This method gave way to hot and cold bluing, and then Parkerizing. Today there are dozens of different types of finishes, all yielding different results and capabilities. One of the most common finishes in use today by professional manufacturers and gunsmiths, as well as the “do-it-yourself” crowd is Cerakote. And, few in this industry are doing it to the level of Scott Richardson, owner of Ronin Arms in Payson, Arizona.

IN THE BEGINNING

Richardson started his creative life as an airbrush artist in high school where he made a name for himself in the Albuquerque, New Mexico, area by doing commissioned drawings for tattoo artists before he was old enough to drive. Upon graduating from high school, one of the local tattoo artists took Richardson under his wing as an apprentice, which began a 21-year career in the tattoo industry. This is an important foundation, because, as Richardson points out, “There is not a lot of room for mistakes as a tattoo artist... I had to become good at not only drawing the artwork but

SCOTT RICHARDSON OF RONIN ARMS



THE COATER OF ARMS



A Ronin Arms 7.5-inch SBR made from an Ascend Armory receiver set with Post-Apocalyptic Hex camouflage.

planning out how I would execute it and remain adaptable through the process. It also taught me a lot about colors, and how they react and look when put onto a medium that is not a white background."

A love of firearms instilled by his grandfather, and a restlessness that comes from doing something over and over again, eventually led him to start branching out and finding new ways to challenge himself and fulfill a creative part of his soul that was unsatisfied. Having left New Mexico almost two decades earlier, a firearms finisher in Arizona asked for his help in airbrushing some artwork on a firearm. Richardson immediately felt comfortable with the airbrush aspects as well as the creative vacancy within the industry that he wanted to fill. At that moment, Ronin Arms was formed.

A CLASS II ACT

Established as a federally licensed firearms manufacturer and Class II SOT holder, Richardson threw himself into the world of finishing with a passion and dedication that few could mirror. His technique for spraying and his ability to create with an airbrush and



do things by hand that others considered impossible was already well established and documented. What Richardson really desired was a deeper understanding of this new medium called Cerakote. He began to study how it was made, how it adhered to different materials and what its strengths and weaknesses were. More than just studying the new materials though, Richardson began to look at actual camouflage patterns made out of textiles to study how they flow, how they are layered in the manufacturing process and how to recreate that on a machined surface made out of metal or polymer.

Cerakote itself is a very innovative material and has opened up some amazing possibilities

Bad to the Bone

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This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. Feel the knife in your hands, wear it on your hip, inspect the impeccable craftsmanship. If you don't feel like we cut you a fair deal, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the item price.

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What Stauer Clients Are Saying About Our Knives



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"The feel of this knife is unbelievable...this is an incredibly fine instrument."

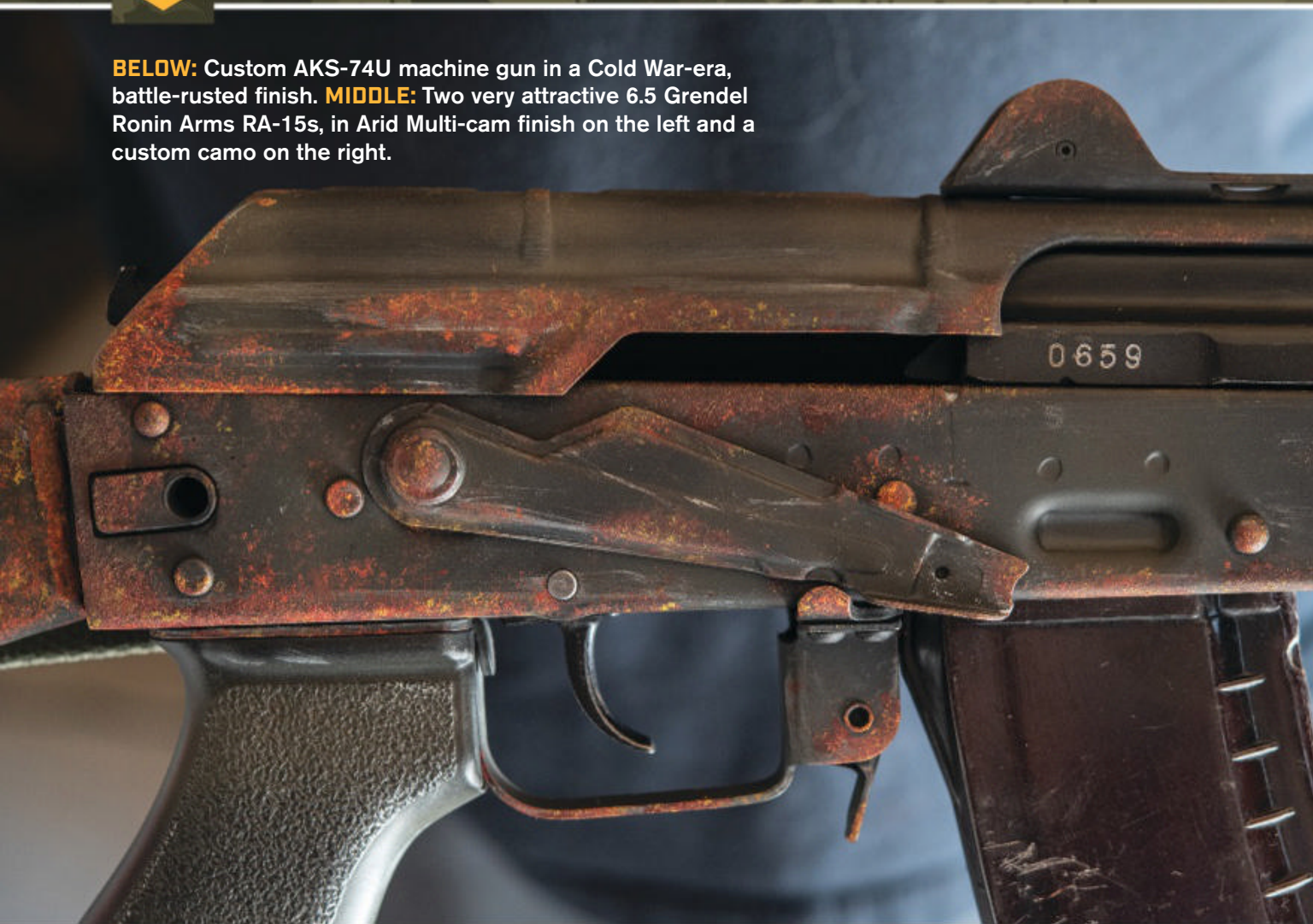
— H., Arvada, CO





THE COATER OF ARMS

BELOW: Custom AKS-74U machine gun in a Cold War-era, battle-rusted finish. **MIDDLE:** Two very attractive 6.5 Grendel Ronin Arms RA-15s, in Arid Multi-cam finish on the left and a custom camo on the right.



within the firearms community. Located in White City, Oregon, Cerakote was started in 1984 with a focus on “developing and manufacturing the highest performing line of ceramic coatings available.” Since its inception, Cerakote has added more than 140 different colors to its catalog with a focus primarily on the firearms industry, but also finding its way into the kitchen and bath, automotive, bicycle and fishing worlds as well.

TANK TOUGHNESS

Cerakote currently offers their coatings in a few different series. The new Elite series offers the highest corrosion and chemical resistance while being applied with one of the thinnest coatings. This series comes in a few different earth tones as well as black and some industrial finishes. This is perfect for internal parts and anything where the thickness of the coating and its ability to endure friction and wear are most important. The second series, and probably the most common, is the H series, which is a heat-cured ceramic finish that comes in nearly 150 different colors and provides moderate corrosion resistance as well as a huge palette with which to make almost any color imagin-



SIG MPX in a custom color finish with hand-painted Ronin Arms logo. Richardson's work really sets it apart.



able, as the colors themselves can be mixed and blended to create custom colors. The C series is an air-cure ceramic that has a heat resistance to approximately 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit. This finish is perfect for barrels, suppressors and any other part that requires a high heat capability, as well as products like optics and such that you would rather not

bake as part of the heat curing process. The Final series is an NiR series that is available for military and law enforcement that features a proprietary coating that reduces the firearm's Infrared signature. Between these different compositions and all of the color offerings, there is very little that cannot be done with Cerakote.

KEEPING IT REAL

One of the areas in which Richardson excels is creating realistic textures and visual effects with his Cerakote applications. His shop is well stocked with all of the modern equipment needed for every possible process. His custom-built walk-in oven will handle objects up to 7 feet long, effortlessly handling even the



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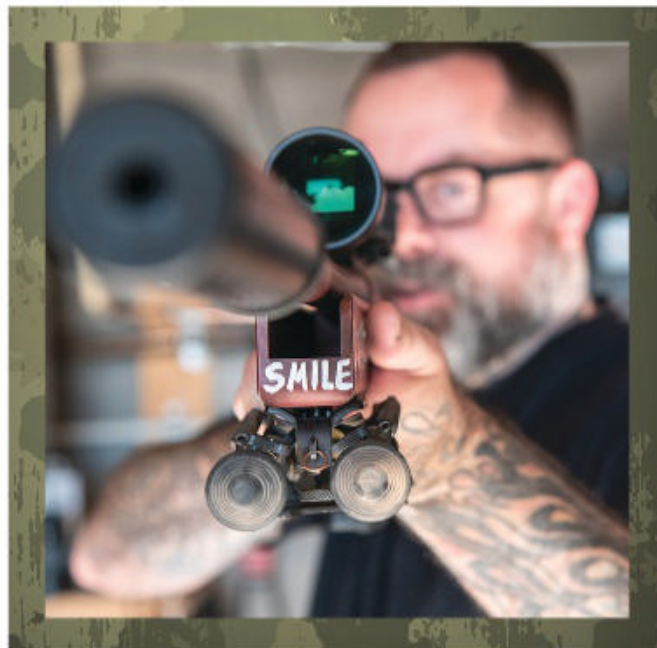
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SERVICE YOU DESERVE
SINCE 1977



THE COATER OF ARMS

largest .50-caliber rifle. He uses a fiber laser to mark and remove material while also being able to use the laser at different frequencies to change the color of the pigment within the Cerakote itself. 3D printers are on site to create holding jigs and fixtures for custom work, and a vinyl cutter is there to create standard camo patterns and make your finished product exactly how you want it. Where Richardson really shines, though, is in all of the areas where that technology isn't viable or applicable, and it is in this realm that experience, a trained eye and a steady hand prevail.

On a recent AK creation, the client wanted his new gun to have the appearance of a gun



that had been left behind on a battlefield. For this project, Richardson studied rust and how it forms, and also looked at hundreds of photographs to see how and where rust would form on a firearm, what colors it took on and how it felt. Most people associate Cerakote with a smooth finish, so trying to create a tactile, multilayered result is not as easy as one would think. For this project, Richardson hand applied five different colors to create the rust—two reds, two oranges and one yellow. In some cases, the color was built up on top of the surface using a layering effect and multiple different tools to create a textured feeling above the surface of the gun. In other places, he hand painted the rust on prior to the black top coat so that he could erode away at it and expose the rust below the surface. Much like an authentic rusting firearm, some of the rust is a corrosive rust and some is a buildup of material, giving the gun not only the visual appeal the client was looking for, but the tactile feel as well. Hand applying the rust took more than four hours on top of everything else that went into this gun, and the result is stunningly realistic.

The airbrush artist in Richardson never stops and he is always looking to try new things. While most Cerakote artists use a vinyl cutter and digital software to create camouflage patterns, Richardson chooses to hand cut many of his stencils so that they are unique and organic. One area where we see some of the creative work is on a .22 rifle that he made for his daughter. Hand cut unicorn stencils overlaid and blended with various forms of pink and purple create a colorful gun that any Princess would be proud to own.

Ronin Arms currently does some finish work for quite a few big-name companies in the industry. In addition to working on firearms, Richardson also has done finish work for knife manufacturers as well as some jewelry companies where he sprays clear coat layers on top of precious metals to prevent oxidation over time.

When asked about his aspirations for the future, Richardson replied, "I want to continue to challenge myself as much as possible every day. I enjoy working on projects that seem impossible and discovering new ways to complete them while learning more about the process along the way."

For additional information, check out roninarmsllc.com.

KILLIN' IT WITH CAMO



Camouflage dates back to the late 19th century with its first real use being at the turn of the 20th century in World War I. Increased range and lethality of the weapons systems in use at the time created a need for more advanced methods of obscuring or hiding personnel and equipment. The earliest form of camouflage was textile-based

and included the coloring of clothing and use of textile material to break up shapes and forms on people and vehicles. Over the years we have started adding camouflage to the actual surfaces of the vehicles and equipment, but true camouflage is textile-based, and so the colors and flow of the pattern is best observed when viewing

it in clothing. Richardson has spent years observing the different patterns in clothing and finding ways to mimic the layering and color bleed found in these patterns. The result is a series of patterns and colors that not only remain true to its original concept, but help break up the shape and straight lines associated with a firearm. —Jason Kostal



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BIG-BORE TEST



GIVE ME 500

BY TODD BURGREN

DUELING HAMMERS: BIG HORN ARMORY M89 AND S&W PC MODEL .500 S&W

WE all accept the logistical advantage of having both a rifle and handgun chambered in the same cartridge. However, there is an “old timey” connotation to this harkening back to the days of single-action revolvers and lever-action rifles. We also accept we are giving up something in performance on the rifle side of the partnering. What if the shooting community’s incessant quest for the “biggest and baddest” has leveled the playing field in this regard?

What am I talking about? Enter the formidable .500 S&W cartridge. The .500 S&W is an anomaly. Here is a cartridge designed for handgun use (remember rimmed cases are ideal for revolvers) that offers superior bone-crushing performance in both handguns and rifles. That can be said of few cartridges.

Smith & Wesson does not make any bones about the impetuous for creating the .500 S&W cartridge, i.e. recapturing the throne of the most powerful production handgun cartridge, which was lost when their .44 Magnum was usurped by the likes of the .454 Casull and others. This was achieved in 2003 with the .500 S&W. In terms of marketing, the mantra of “bigger is better” should never be underestimated, especially when it comes to the American shooting public. The .500 S&W is a straight-walled handgun cartridge that creates dangerous-game worthy terminal ballistic performance from a revolver—magnified even more when fired from a rifle-length barrel.

THE BIRTH OF BIG

S&W collaborated with Corbon/Peter Pi to create the .500 S&W cartridge. S&W also designed a new revolver capable of taming the powerful chambering. Initial .500 S&W loads included 325-grain rounds at 1,800 fps velocity,

Left to right: Winchester Dual Bond 375-grain .500 S&W, 9mm FMJ, Buffalo Bore 440-grain hard cast .500 S&W.





The Big Horn Armory M89 is an elegant lever-action rifle that truly harnesses the .500 S&W cartridge.

The M89's open-top design ejects fired cartridges straight up, and the bolt reciprocates on rails machined into the inner walls of the receiver. Big Horn Armory mounts a Skinner aperture sight.



SPECIFICATIONS

BIG HORN ARMORY M89

CALIBER:	.500 S&W
BARREL:	18 inches
OA LENGTH:	37 inches
WEIGHT:	7.625 pounds
STOCK:	Black walnut
SIGHTS:	Skinner aperture sight
ACTION:	Lever
FINISH:	Dark metal
MSRP:	\$2,499

400-grain rounds at 1,625 fps, and 440-grain rounds at 1,625 fps. Load availability has expanded greatly with most of the major ammunition manufacturers offering .500 S&W such as Hornady, Winchester and Federal. Custom ammunition makers such as Buffalo Bore Ammunition quickly realized the potential of the .500 S&W, jumping on board with a myriad of load options further exploiting the potency of the round. The .500 S&W Magnum truly comes into its own when used with heavier bullets, particularly those weighing 500 grains or more.

BIG HORN'S BEAST

Imagine, if you would, a rifle with great handling characteristics, near perfect balance and sights unerringly aligned as soon as the rifle touches your shoulder. Those attributes are combined with a chambering powerful enough for any game animal on the planet while still avoiding retina-detaching recoil. The rifle I am leading up to features proven reliability with a large extractor mated to a rimmed cartridge. What mental picture have

I conjured up? The Big Horn Armory M89 chambered in .500 S&W.

BHA chose M89 nomenclature to pay homage to the Browning-designed M86 and M92 lever-action rifles it resembles in terms of function and aesthetics. The M89 is larger in scale than Browning's legendary levers to accommodate the sausage-sized .500 S&W. Big Horn Armory makes the M89 in its Wyoming plant using modern CNC machining techniques. There are no cast or forged metal parts in the gun. BHA components are cut from stainless steel bar stock, and black walnut furniture accentuates the dark metal finish applied.

The M89's open-top design ejects fired cartridges straight up, and the bolt reciprocates on rails machined into the inner walls of the receiver. When the action is closed, locking blocks at both sides of the receiver engage mortise cuts in the bolt as well as matching recesses in the receiver walls for strength. In this system, the blocks serve to lock the bolt firmly in place against the rearward thrust of a fired cartridge. When the shooter strokes the lever downward and forward, the first bit of



motion pulls those blocks downward and out of contact with the bolt. Further movement of the lever retracts the bolt to the rear to extract the fired case from the chamber and eject it. It takes more time to read this description than it does to perform in the field.

In steep, thick terrain, game needs to be anchored quickly. I can assure you a wounded animal will inevitably head downhill towards water. Too often this causes a lot of extra work to extract it once recovered. The BHA M89's upsurge in terminal power compared to other classic lever-action cartridges such as .30-30 or .35 Remington provides much-appreciated terminal punch in these types of situations.

PC .500 S&W HAND CANNON

Upon its introduction in 2003, the Smith & Wesson X-Frame five-shot revolver chambered in .500 S&W was heralded as the most powerful production revolver in existence—a title it still holds today. The revolver is massive, yet surprisingly not totally devoid of handling

or ease of carry. Most of the X-Frame offerings are focused on handgun hunting tasks with barrels 8 inches or longer with muzzle brakes. The five-shot cylinder is 1.920 inches in diameter and 2.305 inches long. It dwarfs the legendary S&W N-frame .44 Magnum cylinder.

A S&W Performance Center .500 S&W was chosen to explore the Smith revolver. The 10.5-inch barrel gives an overall length of 18 inches. The gun is constructed primarily of stainless steel and it has plenty of it, weighing over 79 ounces. The five-shot cylinder was a conscious decision for added strength and durability compared to a six-round cylinder. Also, the five-shot design allows the bolt notch cuts to be offset. The strength of the cylinder is borne out in the chambers not being counterbored to enclose the case heads as would be expected.

Unlike other S&W revolvers, the cylinder yoke-to-frame lockup does not utilize a center-pin running through a hollow ejector rod, nor is there any barrel lug latch. The solid, small-diameter ejector rod is unsupported at the front, but the frame latches the yoke

directly with a spring-loaded ball detent.

While the X-Frame is obviously larger and thicker than its predecessors, the grip frame portion is the same as a K- or L-Frame S&W revolver. There is a caveat to this, however. The Hogue Monogrip designed for the X-Frame is a full-wraparound type with recoil cushioning internal Sorbothane inserts within the upper web portion. All other Hogue Monogrips for S&W revolvers have an open backstrap. Thus, the grip on the X-Frame is a thicker closed-back cushioning design that doesn't increase the overall diameter or reach of the grip beyond what feels comfortable in the grasp of an average-sized hand.

The .500 S&W Performance Center functions like a typical double-action revolver and shares aesthetics with other S&W double-action revolvers, albeit on steroids. The large five-shot cylinder swings out for easy removal of empties and recharging. The Performance Center trigger is well done and ideal for a revolver of this type. The double-action trigger pull is smooth with no hitches and measures just under 10 pounds. The single action is

The S&W Performance Center .500 S&W is a serious piece of hardware capable of impressive power when afield. The Trijicon RMR offers a red-dot sighting advantage.

SPECIFICATIONS

S&W PC .500 S&W

CALIBER:	.500 S&W
BARREL:	10.5 inches
OA LENGTH:	18 inches
WEIGHT:	4.9 pounds
GRIPS:	Hogue Monogrip
SIGHTS:	Iron (Trijicon RMR on forward rail)
ACTION:	Revolver
FINISH:	Stainless steel
CAPACITY:	5
MSRP:	\$1,616

The massive five-round cylinder swung out from the X-Frame .500 S&W double-action revolver.



PERFORMANCE

BIG HORN ARMORY M89

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
Winchester 350 JHP (RR)	1,389	1.75
Winchester 375 Dual Bond	1,930	2.25
Hornady 300 FTX	2,213	2.33
Buffalo Bore DG 400 Mono	1,862	2.66
Buffalo Bore 440 HCLFGC	1,822	2.0

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second [fps] and accuracy in inches for best five-shot group from 100 yards.



S&W PC .500 S&W

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
Winchester 350 JHP (RR)	1,269	3.0
Winchester 375 Dual Bond	1,780	2.75
Hornady 300 FTX	2,075	2.5
Buffalo Bore 440 HCLFGC	1,597	2.33

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second [fps] and accuracy in inches for best five-shot group from 25 yards.



a crisp 4 pounds. The revolver functioned perfectly during all testing, handling a plethora of factory loads from Buffalo Bore, Hornady and Winchester.

While not life-threatening, recoil is substantial with the .500 S&W out of a handgun, no matter if it weighs nearly 5 pounds. Anyone who says different is trying to entice you into something unexpected for their own perverse entertainment. I decided the more the merrier when it came to firing the full-powered loads during testing and evaluation. Sighting in of iron sights and the Trijicon RMR mounted on the Performance Center rails was done with the Winchester 350-grain JHP Reduced loads and then confirmed with the full-powered Winchester 375-grain, Hornady 300-grain FTX and variety of Buffalo Bore loads including 440-grain Hard Cast, 400-grain JFN, and Barnes 375-grain XPB. One load from Buffalo Bore was strictly “verboten” even in the stout S&W revolver: Buffalo Bore’s 400-grain Mono-Metal is specific to the Big Horn Armory M89.

THE AFTERSHOCK

For me, the .500 S&W experience was much more palatable from the Big Horn M89. That’s really no surprise. I have the utmost respect for the super magnum pistol aficionados; it’s just not my thing. Conversations with Big Horn Armory’s CEO Greg Buchel sealed the deal for me in terms of the M89 lever-action chambered in .500 S&W versus other calibers. Greg highlighted the .500 S&W strong points

even over its fire breathing .460 S&W brethren. First, bullet selection for the .500 S&W is much greater, ranging from 200 grains to 700 grains, with an equally impressive range of bullet types available. Most of these are suitable as rifle bullets and capable of holding together at rifle velocities of 2,700 fps or more. This leads to great versatility when hunting, allowing specific loads for animals from small antelope to elephants with the same gun. Compounding this .500 S&W advantage is the 23-percent greater sectional area over .45-caliber rounds. Size matters! Energy transfer with a .500 S&W is decisive on game animals. The M89 chambered .500 S&W offers Taylor Knock Out (TKO) values in the mid-60s vs. mid-40s for the stoutest .45-caliber cartridges. The .500 S&W TKO values rival venerable dangerous game calibers such as the .458 Win. Mag. and .475 Nitro Express. The .500 S&W out of the S&W Performance Center is not far behind these, as its 10.5-inch barrel only sheds 125 to 150 fps in the velocity department.

READY FOR ANYTHING

With the Big Horn Armory and Performance Center .500 S&W you skip the line and go straight to the front in ballistic potency. No excuses are needed for using a straight-wall pistol cartridge as the power is there. Few would argue against the lever-action and revolver being considered a classic pairing, especially on this side of the Atlantic where the lever-action and revolver symbolize so much in the American psyche. The Big Horn Armory M89 lever-action and Smith & Wesson .500 S&W revolver are ideal candidates to push the .500 S&W to its full potential. To borrow an old adage...beware of the person who only uses one cartridge. ●

FOR MORE INFORMATION

BIG HORN ARMORY
bighornarmory.com

BUFFALO BORE AMMUNITION
buffalobore.com

HORNADY MFG. INC
hornady.com

SMITH & WESSON
smith-wesson.com

TRIJICON
trijicon.com

WINCHESTER AMMUNITION
winchester.com



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MICRO REFLEX

TRIJICON'S TINY BUT RUGGED RMRcc GETS PUT TO THE TEST IN TEXAS

BY FRED MASTISON



There are few companies that enjoy the name recognition that has been earned by Trijicon. They have been the king of the hill in the fighting optics market forever and are showing no signs of relinquishing their title. They also know that in order to keep that title they must continue to innovate and make world-class products. It is with this maxim in mind that the development team at Trijicon has designed, tested and now released the company's newest offering—the RMRcc.

TINY TITAN

The RMRcc is a smaller, thinner and lower-profile version of the bomb-proof RMR. The RMRcc is designed to be thinner than the RMR, making it ideal for mounting on popular single-stack and subcompact pistols. The RMRcc is also well suited to mount on 1911-style pistols, and durable enough to stand up

The RMRcc is ideal for mounting on many of the popular single-stack and subcompact pistol models that are so popular now for concealed carry.

"THE RMRCC FEATURES AN AUTOMATIC BRIGHTNESS MODE AND EIGHT MANUAL POSITIONS FOR CUSTOM SETTINGS."





Sean Utley Photo



Trijicon's RMRcc has all of the power of the popular RMR in a smaller footprint.

to the harsh recoil generated by the .45 ACP and 10mm. This is a great advancement for the 1911 crowd. As red-dots on EDC guns grow, those who carry 1911s have been left out a bit. Most pistol optics do not sit well on 1911s and tend to hang off the sides. This leads to possible snags and holster issues. The RMRcc sits perfectly and has a very small footprint. This is also true for those who carry micro blasters. Many want an optic, but most options available look like a full-size toaster sitting on top of their subcompact gun. This is an option to get an optic that has all the features of full-size glass in a smaller size.

Even with a smaller size, it retains a list of solid features. These include a unique, patented housing shape that diverts the force of an impact away from the lens, greatly increasing durability. This is the same housing design used by its big brother, the RMR. This

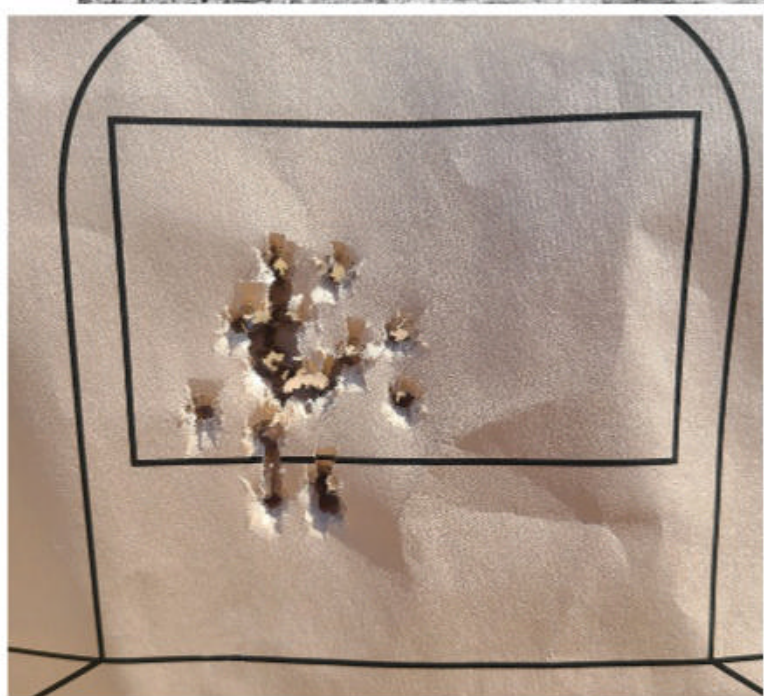
SPECIFICATIONS

TRIJICON RMRcc

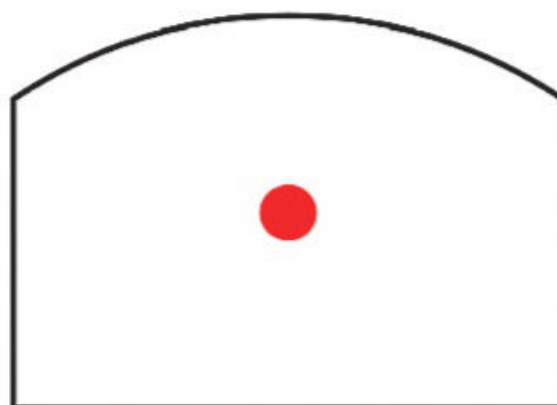
MAGNIFICATION:	1x
SIGHT WINDOW:	0.76 by 0.56 inches by 14mm
GLASS:	Lens tempered
ADJUSTMENTS:	1 tick = 3-MOA Adjustment
DIMENSIONS:	1.8 x 0.9 x 0.9 inches
WEIGHT:	1 ounce
ILLUMINATION SOURCE:	One CR2032 battery
BATTERY LIFE:	Over 4 years of continuous use at setting 4 of 8
MSRP:	\$699

design was military spec driven as the DOD requires that you should essentially be able to drop the optic from space or run it over with a tank without damage. That might be an exaggeration, but the design will certainly stand up to any civilian use. It is also built to withstand worse-case scenarios like being waterproof to 20 meters (66 feet). More than one pistol has been retrieved from the bottom of a lake or stream. It has ruggedized battery contacts and electronics to ensure performance and survivability in harsh environments. As a desert dweller, this is a great feature because dust and range grime have claimed more than one of my optics over the years.

The lens has received special attention as well. In some optics in this category the target can be distorted or seem to have a film over it. The RMRcc has a True-Color multi-coated lens, which offers wide-band light transmission for minimal change in target area color. Like its big brother it has easy-to-use buttons, a common 2032 battery with up to four years of illumination, and a wide variety of mounts to fit most concealed-carry pistols. The RMRcc is available in either a 3.25- or 6.5-MOA dot size and provides a bright, illuminated aiming point under any condition. It also needs no tools to make the changes, which is a very nice feature. Best of all, the RMRcc is parallax-free, meaning simple "point and shoot" operation with superior accuracy.



Trijicon's diminutive RMRcc allows shooters to improve not only their accuracy, but speed as well. The ability to shoot it with both eyes open is a plus for speed.



Brightness control has always been a point of discussion with shooters, and Trijicon knows it. The RMRcc features an automatic brightness mode and eight manual positions for custom settings. A Button Lock-In Mode prevents accidental adjustments to your preferred brightness setting, while a Battery Conservation Mode adjusts the aiming dot to ambient lighting conditions after 16.5 hours without a button push to further extend battery life. Windage and elevation adjustments allow for quick and easy zeroing with no need for any special tools or devices.

RUN TIME

I had the privilege of getting some time on the range with this new optic at a Trijicon event in Texas recently and was incredibly pleased with

the performance. The optic fits the ever-growing world of slender guns designed for concealed carry as well as my beloved 1911s. All are guns that the traditional RMR did not fit quite right. The event for me was more than just an opportunity to test a new optic; it was a chance for me to dig into the weeds about why we needed this new optic and in turn why we needed an optic on a handgun at all. I have shot countless guns with glass on them, but this event helped me to understand just how helpful they really are.

First, the most obvious point is speed. Once you know how to present your firearm into the fight using the RMRcc, you are able to much more quickly engage your target. I teach in classes that you have to get your gun into the fight quickly and get the sights

“THE OPTIC FITS THE EVER-GROWING WORLD OF SLENDER GUNS DESIGNED FOR CONCEALED CARRY AS WELL AS MY BELOVED 1911S.”

on the target in the blink of an eye. An optic makes that even easier and in turn, faster. Something I had not considered, however, is that shooting with both eyes open allows you a better field of view and ultimately allows you a better opportunity to know when not to shoot. Situational awareness is challenged in a shooting, and being able to see more of our downrange area can make the difference between success and tragedy. There have been countless cases of innocent bystanders getting hit simply because the person shooting was hard focused in the front sight and was unaware of a person entering the firing zone. In short, it gives us better decision-making tools.

Another concern I had was durability. That was put to rest when we were asked to rack our pistols on the posts we were shooting around. In fact, we were asked to set up malfunctions and to clear them by racking the gun hard on the posts. I took this to heart, figured, “It’s not mine,” and went to town on the post. I had multiple deep gouges in the post from manipulations and each time I would raise the gun back up, the optic was still running and holding zero. This was capped off when we were encouraged to unload and actually bang the optic on the post. Yes, like hammering a nail into the post. Even as a writer, it took me a moment to embrace what they were asking me to do. The RMR is designed to meet military specs and the RMRcc has the same DNA. So, I gave the post several firm strikes with the RMRcc and once again, it stayed functional and held zero. The moral of the story is that the optic is hearty and will survive just about anything you throw at it. This is a major point for Trijicon and always has been. While you might not bang your optic on a post, you should be able to leverage against the optic to rack your slide and do other manipulations.



With its small size, the RMRcc is a perfect candidate for your concealed carry pistol.



Trijicon worked hard to ensure the RMRcc is as tough as it is functional, which the author learned while using it to rack his slide at a media event.

While some suggest that you should treat an optic like a delicate flower, the reality is quite the opposite. An EDC or duty optic must be able to withstand real-world daily use and not require delicate treatment. The RMRcc fits that requirement in my experience.

"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."

READY FOR EDC

The concealed-carry market is huge and presents its own set of challenges. These small and sometimes micro guns have a short sight radius and can be difficult to fire with consistent accuracy. Putting an RMRcc on one of these guns takes away a major stress and allows a shooter to more quickly and effectively get on target. The small size of the optic means we add very little to the overall footprint of our gun, which makes it easy to conceal and carry. The larger field of view we gain is also an enormous benefit for those who carry every day. The RMRcc is a solid optic and something to consider if you are looking to upgrade your carry gun. For more information, visit trijicon.com ●



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SUPPRESSORS



Some trends come on strong and then just seem to vanish into thin air. But there is one that is here to stay, and

it will continue to evolve: modularity. While it is a feature that makes its way into many firearms and related products, it has become the norm in suppressor tech. It makes sense in this platform, but no suppressor may benefit more from modularity than the sort chambered for .22 LR. Being a low-pressure yet dirty cartridge, it responds well to suppression, though your guns will require a good cleaning from time to time. While many .22 cans are user-maintainable and modular, not all are as modular as SilencerCo's Switchback 22.

The Switchback has both pistol and rifle modes of optimization. It proved to be quite impressive in its overall rifle performance.



HUSH, LITTLE RIMFIRE

**PULL A SWITCHEROO—
NOISE FOR QUIET—WITH SILENCERCO'S
NEW MODULAR SWITCHBACK 22**

BY SEAN UTLEY

SilencerCo has a knack for developing cool products that make a major impact with customers, and I'm sure it's getting harder to make a big splash. Maybe that's why they went with the smaller splash of the Switchback 22.

BACK AND FORTH

The Switchback 22 isn't a boring-looking suppressor. It's got a modern, edgy look that is pleasing to the eye. It's got a lot going on, but isn't too busy—they balanced this just right. While you could make a straight cylinder and have the same performance outcome, it's nice to have something good to gander at. But it's not all show, for the flat areas on the Switchback double as flats for wrench placement when it's time to do some work on it.



“USERS CAN CONFIGURE THE SWITCHBACK TO THREE DIFFERENT LENGTHS, EACH WITH A DIFFERENT LEVEL OF SOUND ATTENUATION.”



Form and function combined! SilencerCo gave the Switchback seriously good looks with useful features such as integrated wrench flats.

According to SilencerCo, the Switchback 22 is inspired by technology used in rocket and jet propulsion. According to their website, when it's oriented in one direction, the front section provides the most competitive sound reduction for pistols. When that orientation is reversed, the result is unprecedented sound reduction for rifles.

There are five primary sections of the Switchback, two end caps, a middle spacer called a coupler and two other sections, called outer tubes. These outer tubes are of different lengths—the rear is shorter than the front. While baffles reside inside the tubes, the coupler is its own baffle entirely. It's a pretty slick design.

Users can configure the Switchback to three different lengths, each with a different level of

sound attenuation. While there are three overall lengths, the longest configuration can be optimized for use on either a rifle or a pistol, which is done by how the baffles are oriented. Think of the longer length as having two “modes.”

USER CONFIGURATIONS

Long Configuration: This is the full-length Switchback 22, with all baffles and the coupler connected. There are two levels of performance in this length: pistol-optimized and rifle-optimized. The mode is determined

by how the user orients the front baffles. This correlates to the rocket booster explanation, and the noise reduction difference is rather significant.

In the pistol configuration the

Switchback has a 114 dB rating, while the rifle-optimized layout comes in at an amazing 108 dB with standard octane ammo—the not-subsonic type.

Medium Configuration: This configuration orients the baffles in the longer, front tube—five in total—with one being a blast



The Switchback's stainless steel baffles are surrounded by a titanium outer tube. The baffles can be oriented to enhance performance.

baffle. Noise rating is 128.5 dB on a pistol and 117.9 on a rifle.

Short Configuration: The shortest configuration of the Switchback 22 produces 142.4 dB attached to a pistol and 125.8 dB on a rifle. Length is 2.5 inches, and weight is just 3.2 ounces. Short is cool, but an increase in noise is the side effect.

WORKING THE VUDOO

The Switchback is rated for several calibers: .22 LR, .17 Win Super Mag, .17 HMR, .22 WMR, .22 Hornet and 5.7x28mm. You can use it at any length, in any of those calibers, but keep in mind that only the .22 LR will provide the sound reduction levels stated here. It's also full-auto rated for .22 LR.

The baffles, front cap and end cap (rear) are stainless steel, while the outer tubes are titanium. The Switchback 22 utilizes Click Together Assembly (CTA) baffles. There is an alignment notch on each baffle that clicks into the next baffle, keeping everything in line. It also helps make the suppressor easy to clean. Each baffle has a cutout that allows gases to flow through the suppressor. These cutouts must be aligned properly for maximum sound



The Switchback can be configured in three different lengths, giving the user customization, but with a short length comes a noise penalty. Configure according to your environment.

SPECIFICATIONS

SILENCERCO SWITCHBACK 22

CALIBER:	.22 LR, .22 WMR, .22 Hornet, .17 HMR, .17 Win Super Mag, 5.7x28mm
ATTACHMENT TYPE:	Direct thread
WEIGHT:	3.2 to 6.4 ounces
LENGTH:	2.50 to 5.75 inches
DIAMETER:	1.07 inches
NOISE RATING:	108 dB (.22 LR Rifle Optimized); 114 dB (Pistol Optimized)
MATERIAL:	Titanium and stainless steel
FINISH:	Cerakote
COLOR:	Raw and black nitride
MSRP:	\$499

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PERFORMANCE

VUDOO GUN WORKS V-22 [20-INCH BARREL]

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
Eley Tenex 40 (unsuppressed)	1,105	0.232
Eley Tenex 40 (suppressed)	1,102	0.216

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second and accuracy in inches for best five-shot group from 50 yards.

performance. While initially it might seem complicated, it’s really not. However, taking some time to dismantle and get familiar with the Switchback before you shoot it would be a good idea.

I placed the Switchback on a Vudoo V-22 bolt action mated to a Masterpiece Arms chassis. This is a great .22 setup and one I hope to shoot for NRL22 matches in the future. Since I’m a fan of Eley .22 ammo, that’s what I used to test for dispersion and point of impact (POI) shift. I have to take SilencerCo’s word on the sound performance numbers.

Eley’s Tenex was shot at 50 yards. The

rifle was shot both suppressed and unsuppressed to note any changes. POI with the Switchback attached was 0.5 inches high. Groups were slightly better with the can attached as well—0.232 unsuppressed and 0.216 suppressed. It appears the Switchback 22 had no ill effects on the Vudoo.

Eley ammo has always been our ammo of choice, and this occasion would be no different. But instead of using a subsonic load, I used a match load. Eley Tenex produces good groups from the Vudoo, and I wanted to see if the SilencerCo would keep in step. In short, it did. While group sizes were barely different, the accuracy potential was obvious

when the second string of suppressed fire produced four shots into literally one 0.231-inch hole, edge to edge. Of course I blew it, with a flier opening it up to a 0.216-inch center-to-center group. Oh, well.

To say this setup was quiet really means nothing. The suppressed .22 is “movie quiet” for sure, and the firing pin striking the round actually registers louder on the meter than the actual firing of the round does. Every time I experience this with a .22, I realize it is likely the most practical and usable form of suppression.

NIGHTY NIGHT

SilencerCo may have hit a homer with the Switchback 22. It’s crazy quiet. The Switchback 22 doesn’t have any negative effect on accuracy, either. It looks good, and has multiple personalities. All you’ll need to do is figure out which personality fits your needs. In my opinion, the long, quiet configuration is all you might ever need. Simply detach and disassemble occasionally for cleaning. For more information, visit silencerco.com.

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**A COLLECTION OF
PURPOSE-BUILT
KNIVES TO MATCH
EVERY LIFESTYLE**

BY GARRETT LUCAS



We all live different lives and participate in different activities, so it stands to reason that we have different needs when it comes to our daily carry knives. Whether you're an avid outdoorsman, a trained combative, a cop on the beat or just the average guy at work or home, there's something for everyone in this issue's selection of purpose-built EDC knives.

Whether you're focused on finding a fighting knife, a blade with the latest premium components or just something different from the rest of the pack, the companies showcased here are sure to have something you want or need. It's all about finding the right tool for the job and the right knife you can integrate into your daily life. From old-school charm to the latest tactical offering, no matter what you choose, you'll find sleek lines, clean grinds and performance that will last a lifetime.

BENCHMADE MEDIATOR

One of the latest marvels in Benchmade's Black Class line of knives is the new Mediator push-button automatic. Though very similar in form and size to the 9400 Auto Osborne, the Mediator has a few distinguishing characteristics that sets it apart. First, it houses a blade made of the much-lauded CPM-S90V super steel. S90V is a particle-metallurgy steel that is highly regarded for its corrosion resistance and edge retention, though it takes a little extra time to maintain.

Another difference is the use of highly textured G10 for the handle material. G10 is a grippy material that excels in tactical applications, and the added texturing makes it perform even better under adverse conditions. Finally, the Mediator offers a manual safety to prevent accidental deployment, though the push-button is recessed nicely to guard against that happening. The safety also works when the blade is opened to prevent an inadvertent collapse.

The Mediator sports essentially the same reverse tanto tip profile as the Auto Osborne, making it an ideal choice for piercing thrusts. The grind on the Mediator is not as high as the Osborne, featuring instead more of a saber-style grind. This gives some advantage to the Osborne for slicing but retains extra blade material for additional strength.

A deep-carry clip is affixed for better concealment and is oriented for tip-up carry. The clip is reversible with pilot holes on the



The Mediator's blade was centered nicely and the automatic action was extra snappy with a positive lock-up.



SPECIFICATIONS

BENCHMADE MEDIATOR

BLADE LENGTH:	3.30 inches
BLADE THICKNESS:	0.115 inches
BLADE FINISH:	Cerakote
POINT:	Reverse Tanto
OPEN LENGTH:	7.75 inches
CLOSED LENGTH:	4.45 inches
WEIGHT:	2.89 ounces
OPERATING SYSTEM:	Automatic
HANDLE THICKNESS:	0.52 inches
MSRP:	\$295



Though the Mediator's push button is recessed nicely, the knife still offers up a safety switch for two-way security.



The Mediator includes a deep-carry clip for low-profile use.



The Dawson Knives Snakebite includes strategically placed and comfortable jimping for bearing down on hard work.

SPECIFICATIONS

DAWSON SNAKEBITE

BLADE LENGTH:	3 inches
BLADE THICKNESS:	0.14 inches
BLADE MATERIAL:	CPM-3V
ROCKWELL:	60-61
TOTAL LENGTH:	6.75 inches
FINISH:	Arizona Copper/clear Cerakote
GRIP MATERIAL:	Marble Carbon Fiber
WEIGHT:	4 ounces (6 w/sheath)
MSRP:	\$190

knife with Marble Carbon Fiber grip scales and the company's Arizona Copper finish. For such a compact blade, there's a lot of work and thought that goes into the production of each Snakebite. Made from CPM-3V steel, the full-tang knife features a modified sheep's foot blade profile that not only provides a lot of belly for cutting, but also offers excellent control with extremely

opposite side of the frame, though lefties will need to orient themselves to using an index finger for the push-button rather than a thumb. A hole is also available for your favorite lanyard to improve ease of retrieval from a pocket. The blade on the review Mediator I received was centered nicely and locked solidly into place, and the action was extremely snappy. The grind concluded to a very clean edge finish that was hair-popping sharp out of the box. Of course, Benchmade offers its lifetime sharpening service for its customers as well. All in all, the Mediator handled and performed well. The controls were easy to access and engage, and with its lightweight construction it carried quite easily. It's the perfect blend of high-performance materials that bridges the gap between a full-blown tactical blade and the essential EDC folder. (benchmade.com)

DAWSON KNIVES SNAKEBITE For hard work in the field or around the shop, sometimes the best EDC knife is a fixed-blade. And being built for hard use doesn't mean it can't be beautiful as well. Dawson Knives is now offering the company's Snakebite EDC



“...THE USER GETS THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS—A KNIFE BUILT FOR TOUGH JOBS, BUT THAT LOOKS LIKE IT BELONGS IN A DISPLAY CASE.”



The Malga 6, from MKM Knives, brings high-end materials to a Swiss-army style concept knife.

comfortable jimping on the spine. CPM-3V is another powder-metallurgy steel that is known for its strength and toughness.

CPM-3V can take abuse that would wreck other blades, yet it still offers excellent edge retention as well. The folks at Dawson Knives improve upon that performance by utilizing a differential heat treatment with the CPM-3V. This results in one part of the blade being harder than the other, and it creates a hamon, like can be found on older Japanese blades.

The Marble Carbon Fiber grip scales are fairly thick for such a small blade, but with their superb 3-D contouring they are extremely comfortable and provide a solid purchase on the knife to do that hard work. The grip scales are polished and notched by hand for an elegant appearance that is contrasted beautifully by the Arizona Copper blade finish. The copper tone is achieved with a proprietary, heat-treat process that brings the color out of the steel itself. The toning is different for each individual knife, and once achieved, a clear Cerakote layer is applied to the blade to protect against corrosion.

The Snakebite I received had a very high flat grind with a little extra meat left at the spine for extra strength and hard work. The blade also featured a generous choil for such a compact knife, allowing the user to choke up a bit for finer detail work. I really enjoyed the oversized grip that made the Snakebite easily the most comfortable, small fixed-blade knife I have worked with in a very long time.

The Snakebite ships with a Kydex pocket sheath that includes an integral flap/clip that keeps the knife positioned for easy access. For its very reasonable selling price, the user gets the best of both worlds—a knife built for tough jobs but that looks like it belongs in a display case. It's the tank-tough EDC option for those times when a folder just won't get the job done. (dawsonknives.com)

MKM MALGA 6

Even traditionalists want the best in performance and aesthetics from their knives, and they often appreciate something that's unique in its own right. MKM (Maniago Knife Makers) has answered their call with the new Malga 6 folder. Taking the concept of a Swiss Army Knife one step further, MKM utilizes premium materials to elevate this class of slipjoint knives.

SPECIFICATIONS

MKM MALGA 6

CLOSED LENGTH:	3.94 inches
BLADE LENGTH:	2.64 inches
BLADE THICKNESS:	0.10 inches
WEIGHT:	2.79 ounces
BLADE STEEL:	Bohler M390
BLADE STEEL HARDNESS:	HRC 58/60
BLADE FINISH:	Stone washed
LOCKING SYSTEM:	Slipjoint
HANDLE MATERIAL:	Micarta
MSRP:	\$130, knife; \$30, sheath

The hero of the Malga 6 story is the main blade, which is 2.6 inches long and is made from Bohler’s M390 steel. Another popular super steel, M390 is known for its extreme edge-holding capabilities as well as its resistance to corrosion. Though it’s a little



ABOVE LEFT: MKM Knives offers a supple leather pocket sheath that can be used to protect the Malga 6. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The hero of the Malga 6 story is the high-quality, M390 blade with superior edge retention.



harder to maintain, once you’ve got the edge you want, it’s going to last for quite a while. That’s a quality that can come in quite handy out in the field.

The Malga 6 offers 5 other tools—apart from the blade—that are crafted from 420 stainless steel for tough use and resistance to the elements. One tool is the combination flat-head screwdriver/bottle opener, and the others

are a can opener, reamer, a corkscrew and, interestingly enough, a fork. All tools, including the blade, are treated with a stonewash finish that gives a rustic appeal to the Malga 6. Another departure from the typical SAK-style knives is the use of Micarta for the grip slabs. Where polymer or metal slabs can often get slick in wet conditions, Micarta offers excellent traction for the grip, and it looks good, too.

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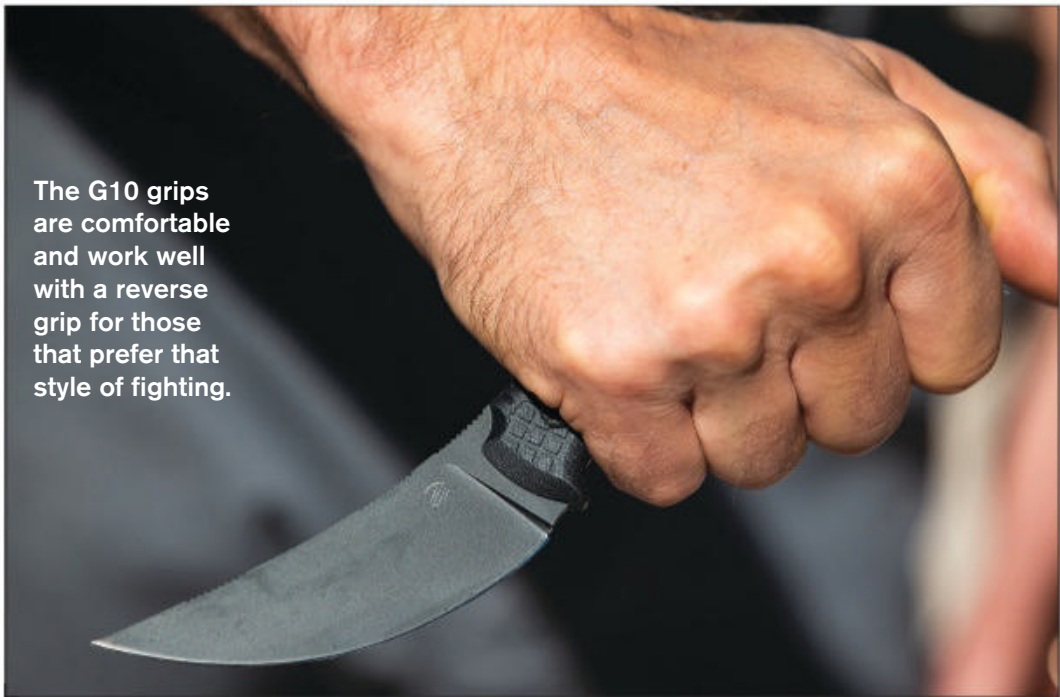
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The Chopper ships with a Kydex sheath that set up for comfortable, ambidextrous IWB carry.



The G10 grips are comfortable and work well with a reverse grip for those that prefer that style of fighting.



The Malga 6 is currently offered with natural Micarta and green Micarta slabs.

Overall, the fit and finish of the Malga 6 is very good. The grind on the main blade is extremely clean and the edge is literally hair-shaving sharp. The only weak points I could find was the walk and talk of a couple of the tools. The fork and the main blade had good spring tension and locked up positively. The other tools were a little soft in their action and the “talk” was a little anemic.

To add to the Malga 6’s rustic appeal, MKM sent along an attractive, supple leather pocket sheath to help protect the little folder. The sheath includes a flap that can act as a belt loop and attaches to the sheath via enclosed magnets. It’s a nice little combo kit for the cutlery fan looking to step up from a standard SAK. The Malga 6 is a unique blend of latest-gen materials with old-world style and it’s definitely worth a look for those who want top-tier components while still keeping things simple. (mkm.it)

BASTINELLI CREATIONS CHOPPER

For those who like their knives to be a little more action oriented and who have the skills to put it to good use, Bastinelli Creations has just offered up a sleek and sexy fixed-blade fighter called the Chopper. Sized for easy concealed carry, the Chopper turned out to be a completely different knife than



what I imagined when I heard the name.

With a trailing-point blade profile, the Chopper features a 3.5-inch blade with lots of belly for slashing cuts. Featuring a full flat grind, the razor-sharp blade balances nicely and is quite nimble in the hand. The Chopper is another knife constructed from Bohler’s M390 steel, which gives it a superb edge-holding ability. Though M390 is very corrosion resistant, the blade is also given a black PVD finish for a more tactical look.

The Chopper’s black, G10 grip slabs fit comfortably with either a standard hold or a reverse grip depending on the user’s fighting style. The grip/handle is fairly thin, just 0.52 inches wide, making concealment fairly easy. I’ve tried similarly shaped knives in the past that were too bulky in the grip area and that did not tuck away so easily.

The Chopper ships in one of the nicest presentation-style boxes I’ve seen, especially in its price range. It also ships with a Kydex sheath with an affixed loop that makes it especially handy for IWB carry. Bastinelli Creations does different levels of production from full customs to what they call their “Industrial” line where manufacturers like Reate Knives, Lionsteel or Fox Knives do runs of specified

SPECIFICATIONS

BASTINELLI CHOPPER

BLADE LENGTH:	3.5 inches
OVERALL LENGTH:	8 inches
BLADE MATERIAL:	M390
BLADE THICKNESS:	0.137 inches
BLADE STYLE:	Trailing Point
BLADE GRIND:	Flat
BLADE FINISH:	Black PVD
HANDLE MATERIAL:	3D Black G10
HANDLE THICKNESS:	0.52 inches
SHEATH MATERIAL:	Kydex
WEIGHT:	2.5 ounces
WEIGHT W/ SHEATH:	5.3 ounces
MSRP:	\$220

designs. The Chopper is somewhere in between. It is a med-tech knife that is made in the United States but still offers excellent value with its lower price point than a full custom blade. Currently, the Chopper retails for around \$220.

I like this style of knife and, as mentioned, I’ve tried others before from different companies. One was too thick and bulky to comfortably carry and the other suffered from poor workmanship and a weak blade. The Chopper strikes the perfect balance between strength and concealability, and it does so in fine style with the maker’s keen eye for craftsmanship and detail. (bastinelliknives.com) ●

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BODY

Using executive protection tactics to your advantage

You notice them occasionally in the background near politicians, celebrities and executives. They manage to both blend in and stand out at the same time. In some cases, they are men and women in dark suits, sunglasses and a stern look. Even to the untrained eye it is obvious that these are members of a professional dignitary protection team. For the elite, executive protection (EP) is just an accepted part of everyday life. For the rest of the world, though, the cost of having even one executive protection agent watching over them is not financially possible. There is an option, however, when your budget does not allow for 24-hour protection. With a few tips and guidelines, you can be your own bodyguard.

While there is nothing as comforting as knowing that a team of professionals has your back, there are things we can do inside the EP realm to better protect ourselves. Many of these concepts are simply common sense, but some might be eye-opening to you. Without further ado, let's look at some of the basic principles of close protection and how we can apply them to our own lives.

WAKE THE F*** UP

The first rule of being a bodyguard is to be aware. "Keep your eyes open" sounds like a tired cliché yet it is rule number one in EP club. Awareness is the key to avoiding

problems before they ever develop. A good protection team will do everything in its power to avoid any problems and potential danger in order to better protect clients. The best bodyguards never have to pull their gun or wrestle an assailant to the ground because they have planned well and are always looking for potential problems to avoid. Awareness at this level can be exhausting. You need to look all around you to see everyone and everything, all the while appearing to not be looking at all. You will be looking for several things. First and foremost are problems. Is there an angry mob forming down the block? Perhaps a clown walking down the street with a sword? These things stick out to the trained eye. Well, they would stick out to anyone. To be good at awareness, you need to see the man in the parked car half a block away. He has been sitting there for 20 minutes and looks agitated. You need to see the woman walking toward you with her hand in her purse as if she is grasping for something. You need to see into the shadows of everyday life. This is where danger lurks. One specific skill lies in watching the hands. The hands will be the mechanism that will drive hostile action toward you, be it a closed fist, a gun or any other type of weapon. When people approach you and they are concealing their hands, an alarm should be going off inside your head. Now would be a good time to put distance between you and the approaching person.

PERPETUAL PLANNING

Planning ahead is the next skill you need to master. When you walk into any building, you should have at least two options on how to get out. While the front door might be obvious, it is also obvious to someone who might be a threat. If a shooter comes in, more than likely it will

GUARD

BY FRED MASTISON

STRAIGHT 8 PHOTOS



BE YOUR OWN BODYGUARD

be through the front door. Most commercial establishments have additional exits, but they will be filled with panicked people should something happen. Search deeper into the establishment. If it is a restaurant or a club, walk back into the kitchen to see if there is an exit. If you are questioned, pretend you are lost and ask for directions to the restroom. In that brief moment you got a good look at the kitchen, the exit in back, the staff and other layout details. It is this type of behavior that separates the predator from the prey.

An important point is to trust yourself and the little voice inside your head. We are all equipped with an internal danger meter. Some are more developed than others, while many just ignore them. If you feel that something is not right or potentially dangerous, then more than likely it is. Many times, people rationalize these feelings away with catastrophic consequences. Listen to that little voice inside that

says, "Get the heck out of here." In that same vein, do not hesitate at any time to engage someone who might be a danger. If someone is approaching you and you feel threatened, tell them to stop. This is hard for some people as they do not wish to be confrontational, but that is something we need to get over. This will be a litmus test of sorts. If the person approaching you is truly harmless, he or she will stop short and you will share a brief awkward moment as you laugh it off. If that person does not stop, however, then your sense was correct, and you now have a greater opportunity to escape or deal with the threat. Time and distance are our allies and we need to rely on them as much as possible.

BUILD YOUR DEFENSE SKILLS

To be a good protective agent, you need to be able to effectively defend yourself. This begins first with open-hand defense. There is

no shortage of schools and systems that offer "the best" training. Regardless of the system you choose, you need to first understand that we don't fight. Before you join hands and start a drum circle, let's clarify what that means. Generally, a fight is a give and take between two adversaries. The more skilled, bigger or stronger person is going to win that exchange. We do not have time for give and take. Furthermore, in a give and take scenario, you increase your chances of severe injury. The combative techniques used in EP are fast, painful and debilitating. If you decide that physical action is needed, then you attack the subject with speed, surprise and violence of action. At the moment they are down, you escape. There is no "finish" or waiting for more. A rule to remember is that dirtbags always travel in pairs. You might have taken out number one, but number two is not far behind. The second it is safe to do so, call 911 and

A PRIMER ON PRESSURE POINTS



Pressure points are possibly some of the most misunderstood aspects of all combatives and self-defense techniques. To some they border on magic, and to others they are just another gimmick. Law enforcement professionals have been using various versions of pressure points for decades, yet few master them or even understand how they work. As a long-time student and instructor on the topic, I can say with certainty that pressure points are neither of these. Done correctly, using pressure points can be very effective, yet there is no magic involved.

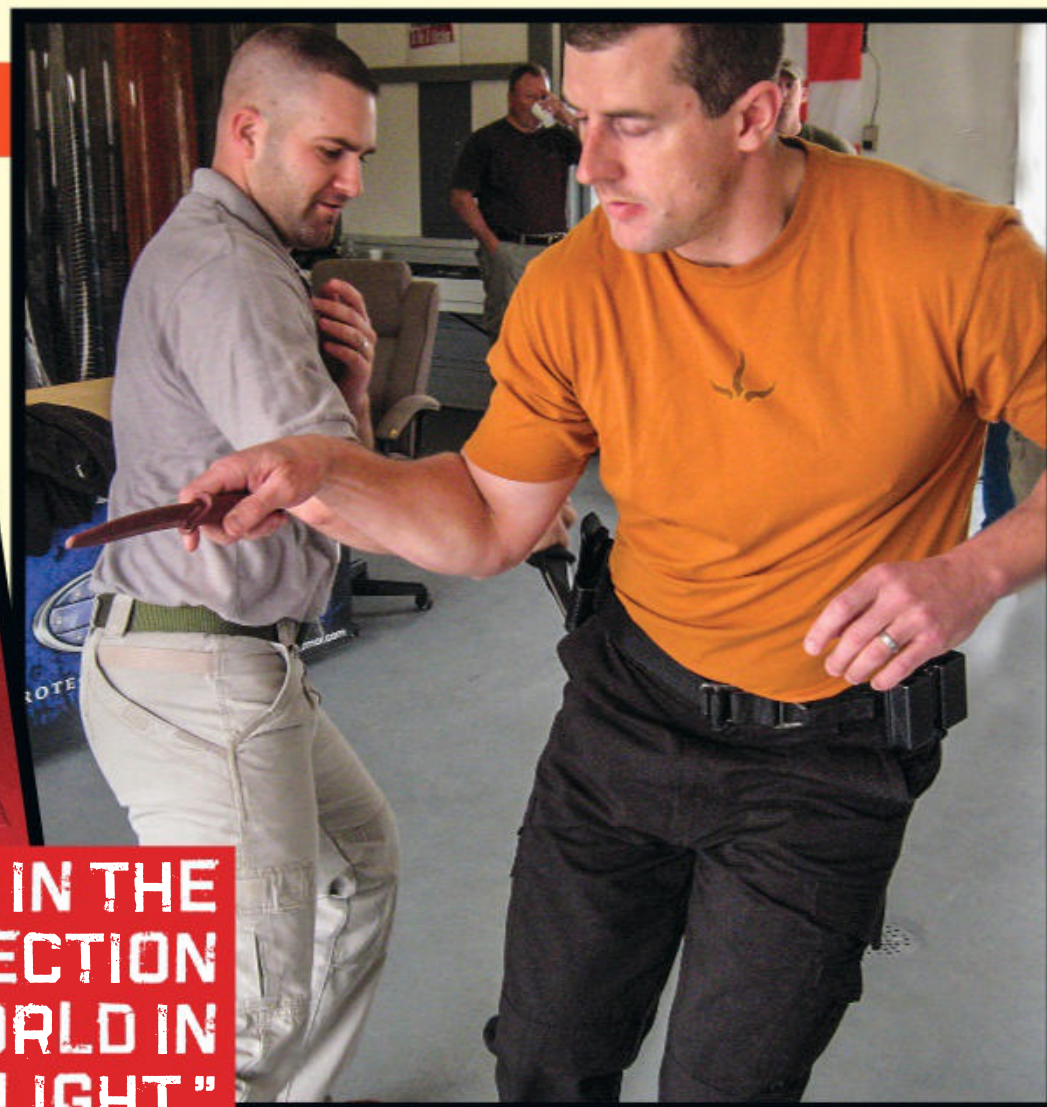
POINTERS: Technically, pressure points are targets on the body that when activated, create a physical response. This can range from intense pain to muscular

and neurological dysfunction. There are three types of pressure points. Strike points are pretty self-defining. Rub points are those that work when rubbed firmly. Lastly, touch or push points are those that work when you press into them. Regardless of the way the point is activated, they all focus around nerve stimulation. The human body is a network of nerve pathways and connections. Pressure point work uses a knowledge of those pathways and unexpected weak spots in order to achieve a physical goal. You know how unfunny it is when you bump your "funny bone." The pain is surprising and momentarily all you can think about. When you learn where other "funny bone" type targets are on the body, you can be more effective.





"THOSE WHO TRAIN IN THE EXECUTIVE PROTECTION ARENA SEE THE WORLD IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT."



KYUSHO JITSU: In the martial arts there is an entire arena dedicated to pressure points called Kyusho Jitsu. It is a very in-depth study of specific points as well as how to use certain points in combination in order to subdue a person. Practitioners of Kyusho not only strike points, but they focus on stretching the nerve that they are working on as well. What they find is that it enhances the effect on the pressure point. Another important concept is that the points are "activated"

(be it striking, pushing, etc.) with serious intent. These points rarely work when there is little or no intent behind it. If you are going to strike one of the points on the forearm, you need to do it like you mean it. This does not automatically equate to just hitting hard, but more with the focused intent of making the point work. This can make the difference between whether a point works or not.

TARGETING: The human body has hundreds of pressure points. As serious practitioners of this art we should strive to know as many as possible. The simple fact is that no single point works the same on every person. Some people are simply immune to certain points, yet are highly susceptible to others. We need to be able to use a variety of points if we expect to be effective. Pressure-point principles have been around for thousands

of years and are still relevant. Used correctly, they can offer even smaller people a tool that levels the playing field against a larger assailant. They are not based on brute force, rather a targeted kinetic response to aggression. Done correctly, they do not require super strength or speed, which is where the mythology begins to creep in. To the untrained eye it can look like a stunt or trick, yet the person on the receiving end is not faking his or her response.

BRAIN POWER: In the end, it comes down to the most powerful weapon we have at our disposal—knowledge. If you are serious about pressure points, educate yourself on every aspect of them and strive to understand why they work. It can make the difference between getting the response you need as opposed to an assailant just standing there staring at you. —Fred Mastison





BE YOUR OWN BODYGUARD

tell them you were attacked and are fleeing the scene for your safety. Tell them where they can find you and wait for them to arrive.

If possible, you need to carry a gun. It is a dangerous world and there is a real need for a gun. Ignore the platitudes regurgitated by anti-gun utopianists. Fact is, "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." This powerful quote sums up the reason EP agents and people from all walks of life carry a firearm. With that mindset, however, we must train ourselves to an exceptional standard. An equally appropriate quote comes from the great Jeff Cooper: "Owning a handgun doesn't make you armed any more than owning a guitar makes you a musician." If you choose to carry a defensive firearm then you must master its use. Seek professional training and then do it again. Shooting is a perishable skill, and by infrequently training you are setting yourself up for disaster. If the black flag is ever raised on your watch, there is a very high probability that there will be innocent civilians around you. A panicked shot or sloppy presentation can end the life of a bystander. The judicious and focused use of a firearm is essential.

DEFENSIVE DRIVING

When we want to be our own bodyguard, driving will now take on an entirely different feel. You will now be playing chess with the cars around you. As you drive in traffic, do your best to not get boxed in. At any point in time you should be able to swerve hard and cut across lanes. This positioning is important in slow traffic as well. When you approach a stop light, give yourself at least one car length in front of you in the event you need to drive out. Focus on staying in either the right or left lane as it helps keep you in the open. If you are stopped in traffic and danger appears, you need to exit the area as quickly as possible. This might mean that you drive on the grass or down the shoulder. The regular rules of the road are really just suggestions and should

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The regular rules of the road are really just suggestions and should be ignored if you need to quickly escape a threat.



"YOU NEED TO SEE INTO THE SHADOWS OF EVERYDAY LIFE."

be ignored if you are fleeing for your life.

This is a good time to encourage you to take exceptional care of your vehicle. Make sure the tires are in good shape, the engine is working properly and you always have at least a half tank of gas. Another important thing to remember is that your car is a 4,000-pound self-defense tool. Should a threat jump out in front of you, run them over. It's blunt and brutal, but effective.

ARE YOU READY?

Those who train in the executive protection arena see the world in a different light. These are professionals who have mustered the courage to look over the edge of humanity and have seen what its dark underbelly really looks like. Once you understand the dangers that lurk in our world, you will never be the same. This is not a "boogey man" or melodramatic play. It is reality.

A general rule is that one in every 25 people are psychopathic and have no conscience. These are people who can stab a child with no remorse or hesitation. In a major metropolitan area such as New York, that would put more than 100,000 dangerous people in the streets of the city. EP agents must embrace the true nature of mankind, then find a balance to safely exist in daily life. By being your own bodyguard, you must do your own soul searching and make the decision to take your protection into your own hands. ●



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MAN OF HONOR

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

-Lao Tzu

Tu Lam's first steps were in conflict. The retired Green Beret, co-host of History Channel's *Forged in Fire: Knife or Death* and founder of Ronin Tactics was born of war, in 1974 South Vietnam, before the Fall of Saigon. It was this tumultuous beginning that led Tu down the path of *bushido*, the way of the warrior.

When he was only a year old, Tu and his family were dragged from their home by the North Vietnamese, intent on imposing their communist ideology on the region. His uncles, serving in the South Vietnamese Navy, were pulled into the streets and shot like animals. With his family separated and his remaining uncles imprisoned in “re-education camps,” Tu's mother fled the country on a small fishing boat, with nothing but hope, and with Tu and his brother in tow.

They eventually found their way onto an overcrowded wooden boat. Destination: the United States. Unfortunately, many refugees died during their escape from Vietnam, but through many hardships and struggles Tu and his family made it to the shores of freedom.





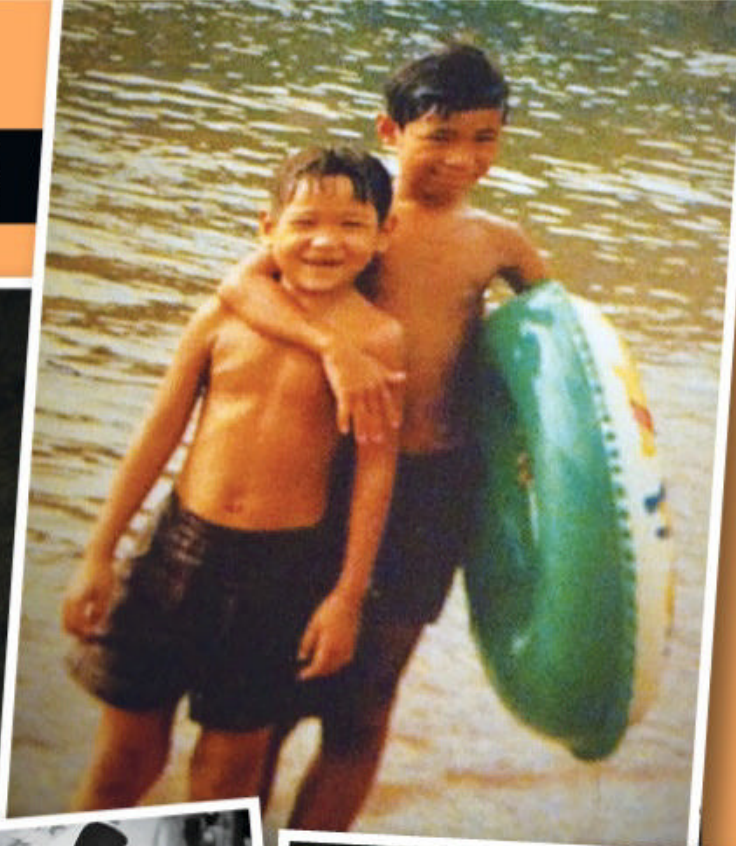
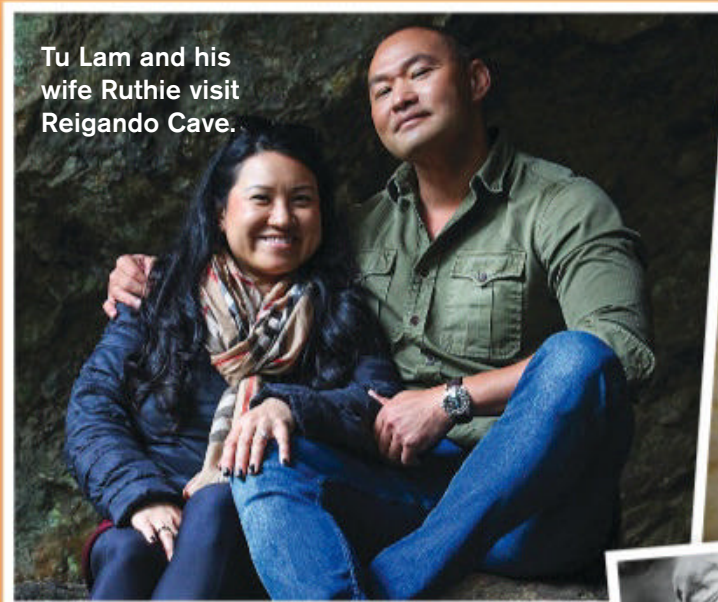
Tu Lam
exemplifies
bushido
as he walks in
the footsteps
of Miyamoto
Musashi

BY JOSHUA SWANAGON



MAN OF HONOR

Tu Lam and his wife Ruthie visit Reigando Cave.



Top: Tu Lam with his older brother. Above: Tu Lam's stepfather in his Green Beret days. Above right: Tu Lam in a refugee camp in Vietnam.

Those words set Tu on his path of enlightenment, rededicating himself to the deeper teachings of the martial arts (spirituality). Following the natural evolution of a warrior and the teachings of budo, he continued to grow on the path of bushido. From warrior to scholar, Tu continued the natural progression to teacher. Through the process of "The Way," he continues on his journey as a ronin (masterless warrior), giving back the essence of the teachings of his life.

As a ronin, Tu has dedicated his life to helping others find strength through total devotion to a set of moral principles, seeking stillness of the mind and understanding of the deeper meaning of the way of the sword.

LIVING BUSHIDO

Tu grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina, just outside Fort Bragg (home of U.S. Army special operations). Both his stepfather and his American uncle were Green Berets, and the path before him seemed obvious.

Being indoctrinated into a strict military upbringing from age eight, Tu joined the U.S. Army at 18 with his sights fixed on joining the ranks of the Green Berets and making a difference around the world fighting for the defenseless abroad. During his 23-year career in the U.S. Army, Tu has served in some of the most elite units the U.S. has produced and has fought in many wars and conflicts, helping to free the oppressed and enslaved.

"I look at the ancient teachings of the samurai as a blueprint to enlightenment, through the way of the sword (war)," Tu says. "It was through my personal experience and understanding of war that I've found the true meaning of life and death. 'Live a life worth living, die a death worth dying for.'"

WORDS TO LIVE BY

During some of his darkest times after the war, Tu turned his studies to the words of a historical 16th century Japanese ronin, Miyamoto Musashi (1584–1645).

The following words from Miyamoto Musashi's *The Book of Five Rings* are engrained in Tu's soul: "There is nothing outside of yourself that can ever enable you to get better, stronger, richer, quicker or smarter. Everything is within. Everything exists. Seek nothing outside of yourself."

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

It was in October 2018 that Tu, his wife Ruthie and some of their closest friends traveled to



Kumamoto, Japan, to visit the cave in which Miyamoto Musashi wrote *The Book of Five Rings* in 1645. This was a spiritual trip for Tu, paying respect to the past culture of the samurai and paying homage to the path that allowed him to selflessly help others.

Meeting with their Japanese friend and famous Japanese journalist Hiro, they made their way to the hotel in the capital city of Tokyo, where the warrior culture is still prevalent to this day. Taking advantage of the strong Japanese black coffee, Tu and his small party were able to fight through the jet lag and take in one of the major metropolitan areas of the world.

While in Tokyo, they visited many temples, but the one that impacted Tu the most was the Sengakuji Temple, the final resting place of the 47 ronin. Tu's connection with the Sengakuji Temple and the 47 ronin goes back to his early years of Green Beret training, due to 47 Ronin being required reading during their study of unconventional warfare. After a year of utilizing low-vis reconnaissance, covert communications and detailed course of action (COA) planning based on limited intelligence, the 47 ronin executed one of the most successful assaults in the history of warfare. The fundamentals of their assault are still being employed by special operations forces around the world to this day.

With deep respect for their commitment to the bushido code (honor until death), Tu found it a great honor to be able to visit the graves of the 47 ronin and burn incense in homage to their memory.

MEET THE SAMURAI SWORD MASTER



During their visit to Japan, Tu and his traveling party were treated to the Japanese culture in ways most outside of Japan never get to experience.

At Hiro's request, Tu was introduced to a Japanese sword master. During this meeting he was shown an impressive collection of antique samurai armor and weaponry, with swords dating back 200 to 600 years, to the time of feudal Japan. Because the majority of historical swords were destroyed by U.S. military forces after World War II, this was an impressive and rare collection. The honor of speaking with this historian and handling these pieces was not lost on Tu.

Next, they were asked by fans of Tu's American company, Ronin Tactics, if they would like to attend a private viewing of sumo training, in the historical town of Ryogoku, Tokyo's sumo town. It felt as if they had stepped back into 16th century Japan to witness the honor, tradition, dedication and power of this beautiful and historic art.

Finally, in preparation for the final leg of their trip, Tu and his companions boarded a bullet train to Kyoto, where they dedicated their time to learning about and paying respect to the traditions of Japan by visiting the different Shinto shrines around the area. —Joshua Swanagon



Tu Lam burns incense in honor of the 47 ronin at Sengakuji Temple.





A RONIN'S FOOTSTEPS

On a rainy fall morning, a nervous Tu checked and rechecked all his equipment to capture this chronicle as they began the trip to Kumamoto, Japan, to fulfill the primary purpose of their journey—the cave home of Miyamoto Musashi, Japan's greatest swordsman. After the short flight from Kyoto, the group met their driver at the airport and made their way to Reigando Cave, where Musashi wrote *The Book of Five Rings*.

Fortunately, the rain subsided as they arrived at the path leading to the cave, allowing Tu to take in the beauty and peace of the place. Walking the path to the cave, Tu came to realize why Musashi needed this place to write such an impactful book. This was truly a



Miyamoto Musashi's Reigando Cave, where Japan's greatest swordsman penned his masterpiece, *The Book of Five Rings*, in 1645.



place of serenity, surrounded by small temples filled with monks going about their daily rituals.

After they made their way to the entrance, Tu's wife and friends left him with a moment to himself as he climbed the narrow stairs leading to the cave of a man who had had such a profound impact on him throughout his life. It was Musashi's words that helped Tu through years of war and loss and allowed him to look within and believe in his own inner strength. It was the immense honor for such a man as this that stopped Tu as he entered the cave, compelling him to bow and respect the sacred ground he was about to walk upon.

In the center of the cave is the large rock on which Musashi wrote his life's work. Looking at the stone, Tu couldn't help but ponder the years that Musashi lived and meditated with the monks in preparation for writing his great work, before ever putting pen to paper. Musashi needed to be in complete Zen before assembling the words of his life's teachings.

It is said that 10 days after finishing *The Book of Five Rings*, Musashi passed away and was buried on sacred ground, so that his spirit can wave at future samurai as they pass to serve their daimyo (feudal lord).

PROFOUND MEANING

Tu Lam summed up his journey in fine fashion, "To me, this trip was not only educational, but it allowed me to spiritually connect with Japan's past warrior culture. Their dedication and Zen philosophies are nothing short of perfection. Life in every breath—bushido."

Editor's Note: Sister publication Tactical Life published an in-depth Q&A with Tu Lam in the March 2020 issue. That issue, along with discounted subscriptions, are available for purchase at outdoorgroupstore.com.



TRAINING AT RONIN TACTICS



Drawing from his experience in the special forces, Tu founded his company, Ronin Tactics, where he and other retired high-level veterans (none with fewer than 10 years of hard combat experience) teach a realistic, no-nonsense approach to training in hand-to-hand combat and aggressive shooting and weapons handling. The courses are available to both ordinary people and law enforcement personnel. Many SWAT teams take advantage of the high-level training.

Along with the instruction provided, Ronin Tactics also provides gear critical to mission success. Their research and development team continues to develop products that meet the unique demands of their customers. From belts and MOLLE pouches to edged weapons (produced by Green Beret veteran-owned Spartan Blades), Ronin Tactics offers something for every aspect of your mission needs. For more information, visit ronintactics.com.
—Joshua Swanagon

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BY ANDY GROSSMAN



Like millions of others, I fell madly in love with ARs. The platform is just versatile and easy. They just work. A few years back, I was introduced to an AR pistol. I can't tell you the make, model or even what length barrel it had. However, I do remember angelic music playing and a beam of light coming directly from the heavens above shining right on that gun in my hands.

For me, this AR pistol was the ultimate gun, combining my two favorite things to make one tiny, gunfighting beast of a defense system. Personally, I don't only like shooting guns, I really love the history aspect of firearms as well. And, since I was a kid, I always loved learning how things work. I would disassemble and reassemble toys and electronics just to figure out how they functioned. This didn't change when I became an adult, either. I would often disassemble a gun and reassemble it, but never had the guts to start removing internals. When I decided to pull the trigger on purchasing my own AR pistol, I just couldn't find exactly what I wanted. Some friends kept urging me to just build my own, so finally I thought, "What better way to learn than to start from scratch and build my very own AR pistol?"



ENTER ANDERSON

I knew the first thing I needed was parts, obviously. I began looking at lower receivers and found there were just so many to choose from. How the hell do I pick the right one for me? I finally decided I was going to get as many parts from one company as I possibly could to make things a bit easier. I headed over to Anderson Manufacturing's website and started piecing a few kits together. The lower components are where you have to start. This is your actual firearm, so I felt it was important to build off of the lower. Anderson Manufacturing made this very simple with their pistol lower build kits. I added a Molon Labe lower to my shopping cart and a pistol build kit, and was ready to check out when I decided to browse the site a bit more for an upper build kit. I mean, this would make things very easy if I could pretty much get all the parts from one company and then just start accessorizing and customizing from there.

ABOVE RIGHT: Laying out all of my parts was like a very overwhelming Christmas morning. Luckily, Anderson Manufacturing, Falkor Defense, Phase 5, SB Tactical, EOTech and Special Ops Tactical made the task of obtaining all the parts quite simple.



I quickly discovered that Anderson did not have upper kits for pistol builds. However, they did have complete uppers. Now, I know what you're thinking, it isn't really a complete build if part of it was already assembled. Well, me being me and not trying to take the easy route, I decided I would fully disassemble the upper when it arrived so I could put it all back together and learn how it worked.

PIECING IT TOGETHER

Once the Anderson parts arrived very nicely packaged, I began tearing into the boxes like a kid on Christmas morning. I opened everything up and laid it all out on the table; then the excitement turned to anxiety. What the hell did I just get myself into? Keep in mind, I have never built any gun before. I was looking at parts that I didn't even understand their purpose. I started watching a few online videos and noticed a trend. These dudes all had tools. Damn it. I

I knew right away that I wanted to make this gun mine. I have shot a lot of ARs and AR pistols so there were a few features I definitely knew I wanted. A good charging handle and a comfortable but unique grip was a must. I didn't want the grip to look like everyone else's guns with a polymer grip on it. I was going to run Falkor Defense's M.A.C.H. 15 charging handle anyway because of the fantastic performance and great looks, so when I saw Falkor had a skeletonized aluminum AR-15 grip I knew I needed to add that to the list of parts. I also picked up Falkor's Queen Muzzle Break to make sure those gasses worked with me instead of against me when shooting the short 7.5-inch-barreled pistol. The Falkor parts were perfect for this build. They functioned very well and really transformed the look of the gun into something more my style.

Another part I really wanted was an extended bolt release. The extended bolt release for an AR replaces your standard release on the side of the gun with one that comes down and is manipulated by your trigger finger inside the triggerguard. It makes for quicker, more efficient bolt release and could really come in handy in a defensive situation. I had to do a bit of searching but I finally found one over at Phase 5 Weapon Systems. Their V3 Extended Bolt Release is skeletonized and light weight. It really matched that Falkor Grip well. When running the bolt release, it is recommended that you have a little more room in the triggerguard so I also grabbed a Winter Trigger Guard from Phase 5. This allows for a little more room to accommodate larger paws or a shooter wearing gloves.

ASSEMBLY TIME

It was deer season in Michigan. What better thing to do at hunting camp in the middle of nowhere but to build a gun? So, I did just that. I had all my tools, all my parts, a portable bench vice

SB Tactical's SBPDW has the unique and mechanical design that this build needed.



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The EOTech HWS XPS2 is icing on the cake. The holographic sight is small and light, plus was made to blend into the gun perfectly with the incredible checkerboard pattern that Blowndeadline created.

this gun was designed with defense in mind, he and I spoke a bit about history and military themes originally. He came up with this badass unique theme designed after one of the most well-known P-51 Mustangs to ever grace the skies—Gunfighter.

Gunfighter is a world-famous P-51 Mustang that can be seen in pretty much every airshow across the country. The aircraft is a P-51 “D” model that was accepted into the USAAF in March of 1945. That month, it was shipped to England, where it was assigned to the famous ‘Mighty Eighth’ Air Force. After the War ended in Europe, it was returned to the United States. In 1947, it was transferred to the Air National Guard, and thereafter it served with units in Wyoming, New Mexico, Illinois and Kentucky until 1956, when it was declared surplus and sold on the civilian market. Gunfighter just made sense for this build. Fighter pilots would return home from war and even though they might not have really known what they were doing, they would build cars out of all kinds of different parts. The AR was built out of all kinds of different parts by someone who really didn’t know what he was doing—me.

Blowndeadline absolutely knocked it out of the park with this custom Cerakote work, keeping the theme kinda subdued but still making the gun a head turner at the range. I have officially deemed the gun the AR-51 pistol. It’s a Hodgepodge of parts from some great companies and an incredible paint job to bring it all together. I consider it the ultimate custom truck gun, bringing some history into personal protection. ●

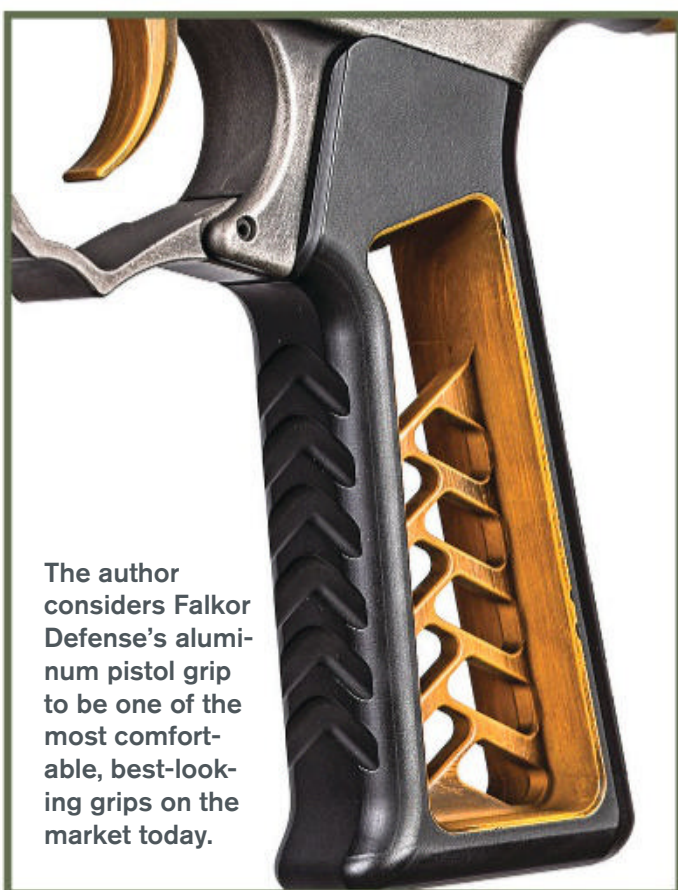


and my phone, which, thank God, had a signal so I could watch some tutorials. The entire process took me about three hours. In the end, I had a pretty sweet looking gun that seemed to function without issues. Yes, it was about midnight, but we were in the middle of the woods so we had to test this thing out.

Later, after shooting it a bit more I realized I wanted to upgrade the handguard to a Special Ops Tactical Javelin. I also got my hands on an EOTech HWS XPS2 in green, which was just the perfect dot for this tiny pistol.

FINISHING TOUCHES

Black guns are cool and all, but this thing now had about six different shades of black and just looked kinda funky. I reached out to the godfather of battle worn himself, Michael Sigouin, owner of Blowndeadline Customs. I kinda left the design to Michael since I had no idea what I wanted. I knew I wanted it to be kind of subtle but definitely custom. Since



The author considers Falkor Defense’s aluminum pistol grip to be one of the most comfortable, best-looking grips on the market today.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

ANDERSON MFG.
andersonmanufacturing.com

BLOWNDEADLINE
blowndeadline.net

EOTECH INC.
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FALKOR DEFENSE
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SURVIVAL





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10 HOLY SURVIVAL COMMANDMENTS

Be disaster ready with these lessons from the Mormon Church

BY MARK LINDERMAN

Faith-based preparedness is a major component of many denominations in our nation today. Among the most prominent are the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), both of which have responded to countless domestic and foreign disasters for over 70 years with budgets ranging into the hundreds of millions of dollars. But there is one religion in particular that many connect to faith-based preparedness: the Mormons.

Members of the Mormon Church have been counseled for many years to be prepared for adversity. Preparation, according to the late Mormon Elder L. Tom Perry, dispels fear in both the spiritual and temporal realms. “The need for preparation is abundantly clear. The great blessing of being prepared gives us freedom from fear.”

The teachings of being prepared for disaster within the Mormon Church are highly structured and seek to build families to an organizational level of self-reliance in times of widespread tragedy. In his book *Lights Out*, 42-year veteran of ABC News Ted Koppel states that the Mormon Church’s achievements are extraordinary. “No group of comparable size comes close to matching the scale and organizational discipline of the Mormons’ efforts to prepare for whatever catastrophe may come.” There are several practices that those entering the world of disaster prepping can learn from the Mormons, one of the world leaders of faith-based preparedness.

10 THE WISE PREPARE; THE FOOL GOES BLINDLY AHEAD TO SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES

The late Mormon president Spencer W. Kimball taught that all members should “be anxiously engaged in a positive program of preparation. It is not enough to hope for the best; we must prepare for it.” He further explained that “the Lord will not translate one’s good hopes and desires and intentions into works. Each of us must do that for himself.”

The Church prepares for emergencies by

establishing and maintaining an emergency-response plan for each of its established wards, or large congregations. It is the mission of the Mormon Church that all wards should prepare for natural and man-made disasters that are likely to occur in their respective regions. These plans are prepared under the direction of the head bishop, who organizes a military-style chain of command that enables him and subordinate bishops access to vast amounts of resources and skills.

Elder Perry warned congregants that “the instability in the world today makes it imperative that we take heed of the counsel and prepare for the future.” With that warning, church members are encouraged to develop their personalized emergency plans and update them regularly to support the larger mission of the Mormon Church.

9 AVOID DEBT AND DO NOT GO BEYOND FINANCIAL MEANS

The Mormon Church seeks the betterment of its members beyond just being prepared for disasters. It just so happens that being financially responsible and being prepared go hand in hand with their teachings. Church leadership asks that individuals and families discipline themselves by avoiding debt and living within their means. It’s good financial strategy and serves the purpose of putting congregants in a better position to help others during times of personal or widespread crisis.

As those outside of the Mormon Church



10 COMMANDMENTS

look to prepare themselves for the apocalypse, it's more than easy to fall into the "tech trap" in which Americas purchase needless items to "feel" more prepared. Instead, preppers may have to forgo their bug-out boats and disaster bunkers to be a bit more frugal and save for that rainy-day fund.



THE WISE MAN TAKES FOOD STORAGE SERIOUSLY

If there is one area in which the Mormons shine, it is their food-storage capabilities; there are plenty of books available on the subject. The late Mormon president Gordon B. Hinckley informed his membership that they "have built grain storage and storehouses and stocked them with the necessities of life in the event of a disaster." So important is food storage to the Mormons that the Church encourages its members worldwide to prepare a "basic supply of food and water and some money in savings."

Church leadership, however, asks its members to have some common sense in storing up food for a potential disaster. President Hinckley continued to instruct members to "be wise and do not go to extremes. With careful planning, you can, over time, establish a home storage supply and a financial reserve." Mormons practice three components of food storage: a three-month and long-term supply, a suitable water supply and a financial reserve from which to purchase more resources for themselves or others. Heed the advice of the Mormon Church and practice wisdom in food gathering, storage and future dietary provisions just in case the next cyberattack takes the national grid down.



GAIN ADEQUATE EDUCATION AND OBTAIN FIRST-AID TRAINING

As with any effort, education is key, and the Mormons believe that fueling the mind is an essential part of their disaster doctrine. In an ever-changing world, Mormons prepare for uncertainties by learning new skills and building that knowledge base as time permits. Former Mormon president Dallin H. Oaks believes that "it is necessary that you have marketable skills, so education is mandatory to personal security and well-being." In a cataclysmic scenario, having skills that not only aid in your own personal preparedness but also market your expertise to



Stock Photo

While the Mormon disaster blueprints pertain solely to the LDS community, many within the prepping world closely follow the examples to develop their own form of off-grid living.

your community may mean the difference between your preservation or your being thrown to the zombie hordes if you can't contribute to the camp.



IDENTIFY LIKELY DISASTERS

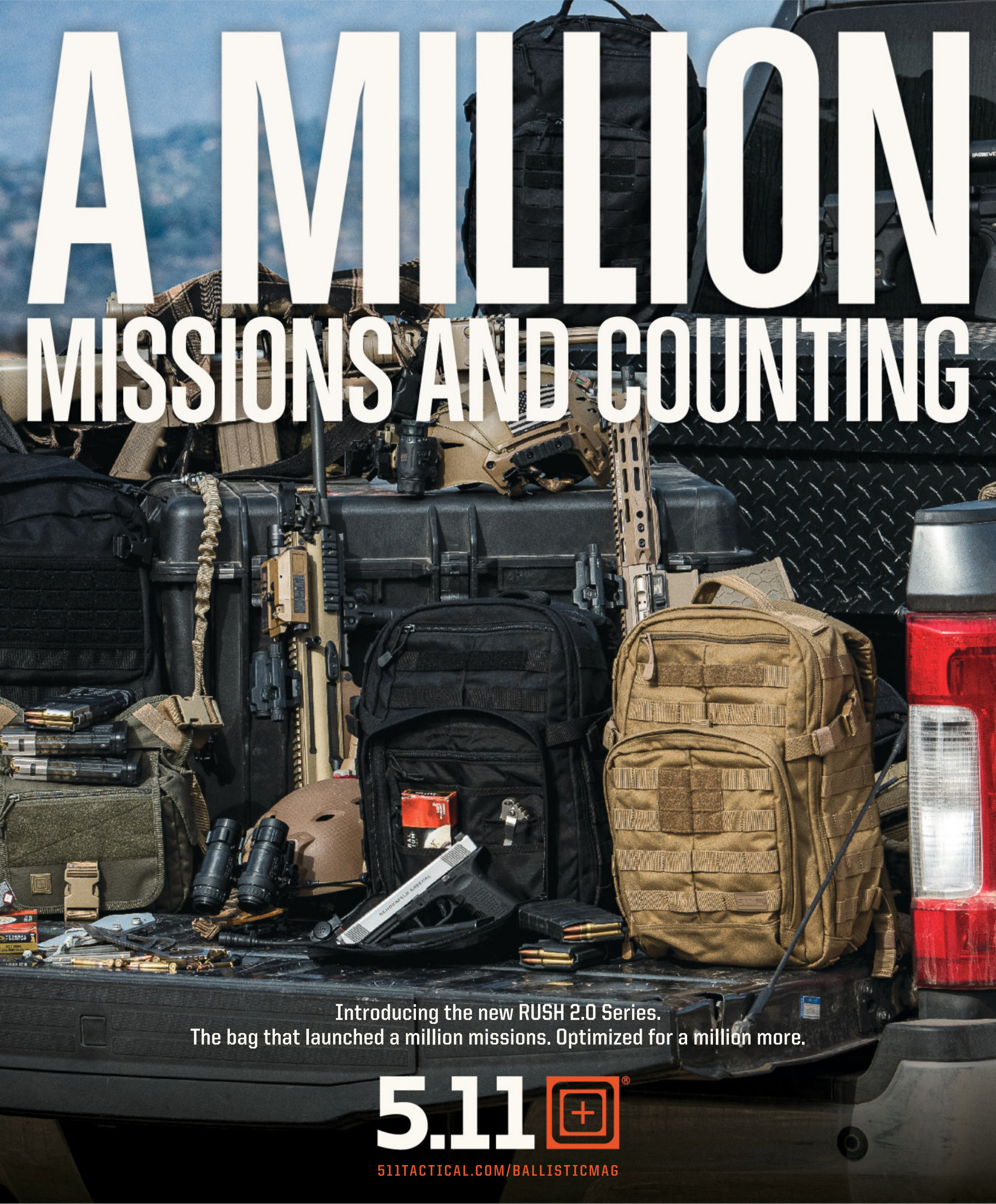
Most in emergency management call the process of identifying local disaster probabilities a hazard vulnerability analysis (HVA). Mormons call it just being sensible. Identifying local and likely disasters is something that many of us do subconsciously, but American citizens should take a cue from the Mormon Church and be proactive to recognize likely disasters in their region and prepare for them. As wards identify potential disasters, they begin to prioritize planning efforts and find short- and long-term solutions. These solutions may be immediate (the first 72 hours), mid-term (the first few weeks) or long-term (more than two months). Hurricanes will more than likely not destroy Indiana, and tornadoes may never touch ground in Alaska, so it makes prudent sense to prepare for what could come down the environmental-disaster pipe. This way, valuable finances, resources and emotional angst aren't wasted for the wrong disaster event.



GATHER CRITICAL INFORMATION

As with any disaster-preparedness plan, gaining information is a critical component to survival. Whether it's knowing the capabilities of your neighbors, where the closest nuclear facility is located or how to get out of your city if you need to bug out, information is always essential. The Mormons take this component of their own survival philosophy very seriously if they are to consider working together as a Church. Gathering critical information enhances assessment and response efforts, which is a lesson that we all can take from the Mormon disaster playbook.

As organized as the Mormons are in their efforts, complex systems are established to help members assess, respond to and report members' safety and needs in emergency situations. While the average American Joe may not develop massive databases to establish disaster-based continuity, the ability to gain information on the surrounding region and an assessment of needs may be worth its weight in gold when the grocery stores run dry.



A MILLION MISSIONS AND COUNTING

Introducing the new RUSH 2.0 Series.
The bag that launched a million missions. Optimized for a million more.



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10 COMMANDMENTS

4 ACCOUNT FOR EACH OTHER AND OUTLINE ASSIGNMENTS

Going against the grain of total self-sufficiency, it's important to understand that we were never created to live in isolation. The Mormon Church knows this and capitalizes on the strengths and resources of its membership. Each Church ward is tasked with the organization of responsibilities among their membership and the designation of roles for those who specialize in various skills. Preparation is key among the wards, as pre-planning efforts will help leadership follow a system that accounts, assesses, responds and reports to the hierarchy of Church priesthood. While more formalized than most are comfortable with, accounting for our neighbors by developing close-knit relationships and depending on community strengths are a vital part of being human and planning how to survive a disaster together.

3 IDENTIFY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Anyone who takes disaster preparedness with any level of seriousness understands that communication is essential to gaining information. Thus, communication is a key component to the Mormon disaster philosophy, but on a level higher than most preppers experience in the United States. While many people concentrate on equipment and storage when developing their disaster plans, the members of the Mormon Church understand that communicating with one another not only builds their individual capabilities but also edifies the entire organization.

Church leaders maintain open lines of

communication with the Mormon Church headquarters, membership and community leaders. This ensures that they can identify and plan for alternative communication methods that can be used in case the phone system, cell phone service, power grid or vehicle transportation routes are disrupted during a disaster. The takeaway for those not within the Mormon Church is that communication redundancy during a disaster not only sounds neat but ensures that American citizens have access to information and can reach each other when one mode of communication goes down.

2 ENCOURAGE MEMBER PARTICIPATION

The strongest aspect of the Mormon disaster philosophy is its ability to move the organization as one body. In turn, many of its wards aren't segmented from one another but rather build upon each other's abilities and strengths. This is rare even among U.S. state government disaster agencies, as most states work from the top down. The Mormon Church, even though it has a hierarchy, organizes much of its efforts from the bottom up, ensuring that the Church works regionally to function as one body.

The Church encourages its members to personally engage in preparedness efforts

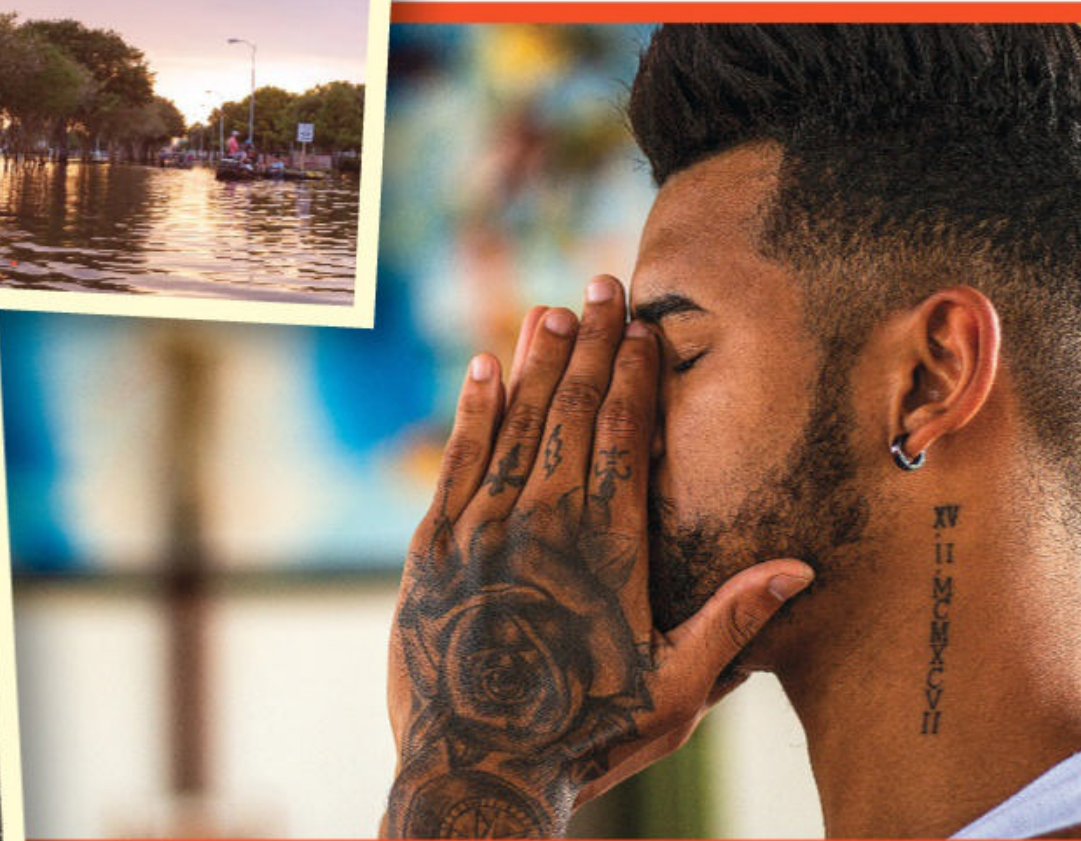
and participate in community-preparedness events, which serve as a method to encourage participation in disaster planning. To that end, Church wards invite members to receive preparedness training in order to strengthen the ward, prepare them for emergencies and aid in community-relief efforts.

1 BE STRONG AND STAND IN THE FAITH

"Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). The essence of being prepared is not only good sense but also a command that conveys that God wants the best for his followers. And, even further, this command offers us a way to demonstrate the love that we are meant to have for one another.

At a deeper level, disasters bring us face to face with the fragility of human life. Lurking beneath our well-socialized exteriors is an intense, primitive need to protect ourselves and those around us from existential threats. One way or another, we must all contend with the fundamental tension between readiness and relinquishment: When do we accept our mortality, when do we fight against it, and when do we give it up to God's providence? This may be the most important aspect of disaster preparedness in the eyes of the Mormon Church. ●

The foundation of the LDS disaster preparedness template is faith. Without it, the principles of their readiness as a community lose focus and strength.



Stock Photos

The Constitution only protects what judges say it does



On June 28, 2010 outside the US Supreme Court building all smiles because of a historic Second Amendment victory, left to right, are attorney Alan Gura, plaintiff Otis McDonald and Second Amendment Foundation founder Alan Gottlieb. Gura argued both the *Heller* and *McDonald* suits.

That's why the tax-exempt Second Amendment Foundation (SAF) is supporting some 40-plus federal and state lawsuits to define the First, Second, Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution.

That's why SAF supported the 2008 *Heller* suit that the judges said guaranteed an individual right to keep and bear arms, and why our Foundation financed the 2010 *McDonald* suit that applied the Second Amendment rights assured in *Heller* to all the states and municipalities in America.

That's also why we financed the *Moore v. Madigan* case which forced the Illinois legislature to finally enact a concealed carry licensing system so Illinoisans could protect themselves from criminal predators, and *Ezell v. Chicago* to force the city to allow gun ranges.

That's also why SAF supported *Palmer v. DC*, to force the city to issue concealed carry licenses and *Wrenn v. DC* to ensure equality of concealed carry licensing for all residents of Washington, DC.

The list goes on as we strive to get judges to read the Constitution as we believe it should be read.

That's why we are constantly pushing the legal envelope in state and federal courtrooms on issues involving firearms access for average Americans, ex-patriot Americans, foster parents, public housing tenants, legal aliens, young people, workers and businessmen.

Over 80% of Second Amendment case law has been won by SAF and our attorneys. You can read about all of our lawsuits on our website: www.saf.org.

And you can support the Second Amendment Foundation's legal action campaign to win freedom one lawsuit at a time by making a tax-deductible contribution or becoming a member for as little as \$15 a year. Your contribution makes you an active defender of civil rights.



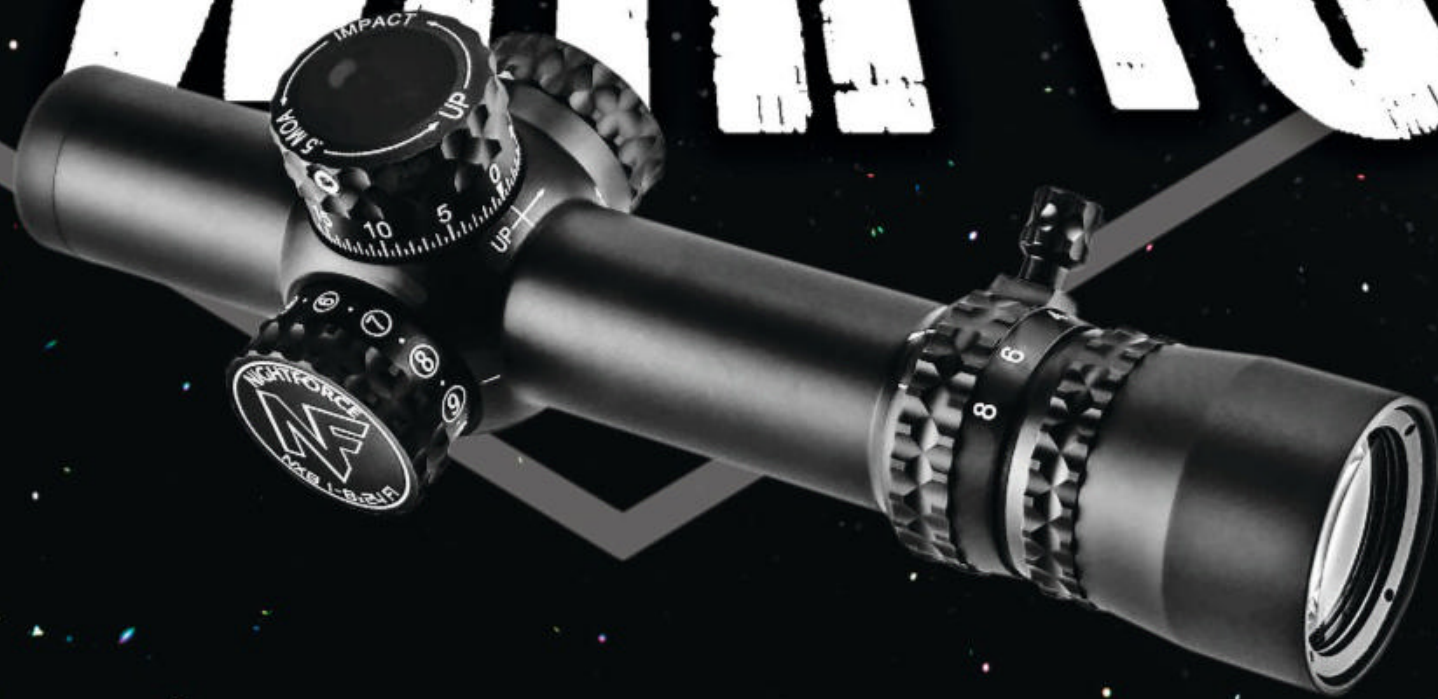
Second Amendment Foundation

12500 NE Tenth Place, Bellevue, WA 98005

Phone: 425-454-7012 Online: www.saf.org

GLASS UP

MAY THE
COMPACT
NIGHTFORCE
BE WITH YOU



VERSATILITY, CLARITY, DEPENDABILITY—THE NEW NX8 HAS IT ALL



Step one in becoming proficient with your rifle is the mastery of iron sights. This has become a bit of an overlooked component of marksmanship over the years, but it is a critical component of shooting. Step number two is to now nod your head at your iron sights in respect and find yourself an exceptional optic to mount on your rifle. The simple fact is that optics improve our overall accuracy and shooting performance. Technology has driven the development of optics to new levels, and we are the happy beneficiaries of this advancement. This is especially true if they come from a powerhouse like Nightforce. For your consideration, I present the Nightforce NX8 1-8x24.

BEHIND THE GLASS

The NX8 is a compact, lightweight riflescope optimized for short- to mid-range shooting. At only 8.75 inches in length and 17 ounces, this riflescope adds minimal size and weight while delivering superior optics and trusted Nightforce performance to any rifle. The small, lightweight nature of it eliminates the top-heavy problem we see in some optics. Additionally, in the 1x setting it is truly 1x. Laugh if you will, but many optics with this setting have some minor magnification, yet just slap the label on it anyway. Our test unit came with an FC-MOA first-focal-plane reticle. What this means is that the reticle changes sizes as the power is adjusted. Ultimately, this translates to any given distance measured between two hash marks remaining the same regardless of the magnification range. This is a feature we find on many long-range optics, but Nightforce has gone to the effort to bring it to the NX8.

The optic has an illuminated reticle, which in 1-power can be used like a traditional red-dot optic. You can see the benefits of such a design as it allows for use in close-quarter situations as well as at distance. In fact, at 8x I was able to easily engage targets out to 800 yards with little effort. A nice point of the illumination feature is that it has “off” positions between each setting. I really like this simply because it is easy



While usually at home on modern ARs, the author found the new NX8 to fit Springfield's SOCOM CQB perfectly.

to turn off and on. Like many of you, I hate turning the illumination knob with a concern that I have not got it all the way off. When it comes to going long, we use the built-in Power Throw Lever (PTL). The throw on the NX8 is as smooth as glass, yet not loose and sloppy. I am not sure what voodoo they have managed to accomplish this, but it is the best I have experienced. For those preferring to dial for long shots, the ZeroStop elevation adjustment allows for a rapid and positive return to zero. Adjustments are a true 0.2 Mil-Radian or 0.50 MOA. The turrets have 100 MOA of elevation and windage adjustments, which covers pretty much everything between bad breath distance and way over there. Clicks on the turret are clean and distinct without being overly tight.

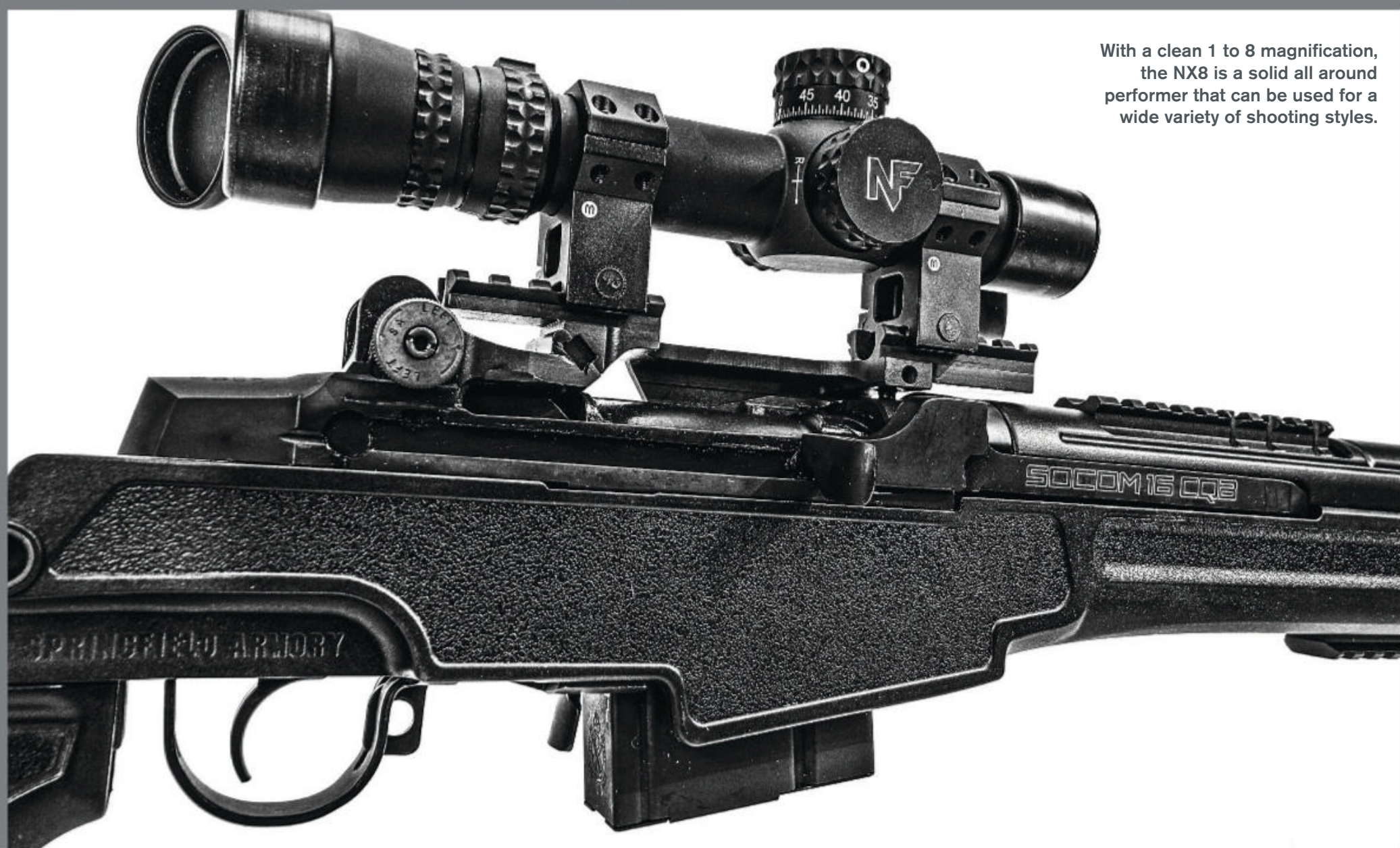
FIT FOR A SPRINGFIELD

For testing I decided to go outside the box a bit. While the NX8 is comfortably at home on your AR-15 or a tactical team M-4, I thought it needed to sit atop something a little grander. For that, I reached out to my friends at Springfield Armory and, *viola*, the box was in the mail. The blaster for this piece would be the modern version of the classic M1A reconfigured for a modern world with modern problems. The M1A SOCOM CQB

BY FRED MASTISON



MAY THE COMPACT NIGHTFORCE BE WITH YOU



With a clean 1 to 8 magnification, the NX8 is a solid all around performer that can be used for a wide variety of shooting styles.

soon arrived and a smile crept across my face. The M1A SOCOM 16 CQB 7.62 brings the rugged M-14 action into the Information Age. The gun's beating heart is John Cantius Garand's peerless battle rifle action upgraded with 0.135-inch ghost ring sights and a 16.25-inch premium carbon steel 1:11-twist barrel. All this rides inside an Archangel composite chassis that features a collapsible stock and plenty of room for accessories. It is a beautiful rifle, and with the addition of a 4th generation steel scope mount, we were off to the races.

I chose the M1A SOCOM 16 CQB because it is chambered in 7.62mm and would give me a little more recoil to deal with compared to my soft shooting M-4.

I spent a few minutes getting zeroed and then started loading mags for the testing. Even during the zeroing process something jumped out at me. While it is not my first time behind Nightforce optics, I am nonetheless amazed at the clarity of the glass. This is a phrase that gets thrown around quite a bit, but once

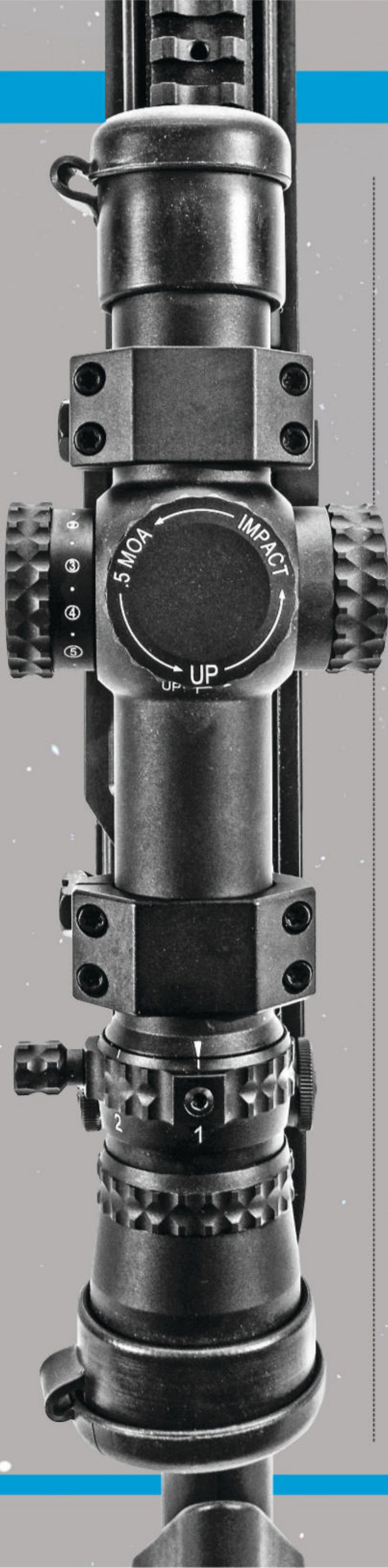
you experience the crystal-clear view, you will never look at lesser optics the same way again. I am a hardcore accuracy nerd so I was compelled to run a box test at 100 yards to confirm turrets and adjustments. In the back of my mind, I knew this was unnecessary, but it was very pleasing to see the scope not miss a beat. In the end, when I did my last dialing the scope came right back to zero. Following that, I spent some time running the gun between near and far targets to get a feel for holds. While I could dial for distance, I wanted to run for speed in the first half of the testing. I set the scope at 3x power and bounced around between targets at 25 yards and 300 yards. Once again, the clean glass made finding my target a breeze. Even with a slightly pushier 7.62mm round, I was fast between targets. With the intermediate shooting done, I wanted to give it a run at distance.

Using a sandbag and a sand sock at the rear of the gun, I started at 100 yards on silhouette steel. I increased magnification slightly

SPECIFICATIONS

NIGHTFORCE NX8

MAGNIFICATION:	1-8x
TUBE DIAMETER:	30mm
LENGTH:	8.75 inches
WEIGHT:	17 ounces
FIELD OF VIEW 1X:	106 feet at 100 yards
FIELD OF VIEW 8X:	13 feet at 100 yards
FOCAL PLANE:	First
ZERO STOP:	Yes
ILLUMINATION:	Daylight visible
ELEVATION TURRET:	Exposed, marked XX mils, .2 mil increments
WINDAGE TURRET:	Capped, marked XX mils, .2 mil increments
RETICLE:	FC-Mil or FC-MOA
MSRP:	\$1,750



at each stage and eventually was pounding steel at 800 yards. I had a hazy, overcast day but I was easily able to get on target quickly. The last thing I wanted to test was the 1x magnification and using the optic like I would a red-dot. Targets were switched out to paper and a moving drill was set up. The buzzer cried out, and I quickly raised the gun and approached the first target. Shots rang out and I was rewarded with solid center-mass hits. The drill pressed on to a second, third and fourth target. The drill went well despite a painfully ugly reload midway through the set. The toughest part of using a "scope" as a red-dot is that many people can not make the jump to shooting with both eyes open. This could be the case with the NX8, but I am here to tell you that if you can embrace the red-dot feature of this glass you will be pleasantly surprised. The tube on the NX8 is relatively thin, and the red indicator in the reticle was easy to find even in bright light.

MORE WITH LESS

The NX8 covers less real estate than most 1-4x optics and even weighs less. The list of positives on this scope is long. My only critique is that it has a pretty tight eye box. You will need to make sure to mount this scope with perfect eye relief as it is unforgiving

otherwise. With that, though, I will say this is an exceptional optic. It fits our close and intermediate distance needs very well. The NX8 gives us a 1x red-dot as well as up to 8x power to reach out to respectable distances. Applications of this scope are endless. As a trainer I see this as a great choice for law enforcement because it allows them to cover a lot of ground without having a huge optic on their rifle. It would be one heck of a hunting optic. Weight matters when you are humping up a mountain, and this 17-ounce gem is barely noticeable. The NX8 also has 3-Gun written all over it. Once again, it is lightweight and clear. It would be an excellent addition to your race rifle. Of course, it is perfect for the avid shooter who just wants high-quality glass on his beloved rifle.

To the uninitiated, scope prices can sometimes cause shortness of breath. The Nightforce NX8 1-8x24 is not priced in the upper stratosphere like some other optics. Coming in with an MSRP of \$1,750, it is a lot of optic for the money. Nightforce has built a reputation for excellent optics, and the NX8 enjoys that DNA. If you are in search of a solid intermediate range optic, then you need to take a long hard look at the NX8 1-8x24 F1. For more information, visit nightforceoptics.com.

For those who choose to dial for distance, the NX8's Zero Stop elevation adjustments allow for rapid and positive returns to zero.





BLADESMITH SPOTLIGHT





Any axe that does not meet Hoffman's high standards is used for company throwing practice and testing.

At age 24, Liam Hoffman rises among the ranks of master blacksmiths

BY ARMANDO BASULTO



Many are breaking away from the social norms of their generational brethren and seeking to rise above the expectations of their peers. Some, like young blacksmith Liam Hoffman, are in the vanguard of young people with a revitalized work ethic that would impress the stalwart frontiersmen of yore. Liam became a household name with his appearance and amazing performance on the competitive bladesmith reality show *Forged in Fire*, but this young bladesmith had been on the path to knife-making stardom before TV audiences or even the show's producers knew who he was.

Hoffman Blacksmithing is now one of the most successful blade- and tool-making outfits in the market today. Hoffman axes are considered the par excellence of tool craftsmanship and are in demand all over the world.

In 2017, Liam wrote a book, *Forged: A Guide to Becoming a Blacksmith*, as a primer for new blacksmiths that provides insight and tips that even veteran bladesmiths have found helpful. Hoffman Blacksmithing is expanding and adding employees to keep up with the demand and expansion into new markets, providing tools and materials to other blacksmiths. And all of this focused energy comes from a young man not yet 25 years old who already has more time at the forge than many men twice his age.

HOW THE FIRE STARTED

Liam Hoffman grew up in the rural mountains of North Carolina, steeped in small-town life. Like any natural habitat partitioned off from the rest of the country, things move at a different pace and rhythm in the Appalachian valleys, and the



THE AXE-MAN COMETH



Liam Hoffman
of Hoffman
Blacksmithing

way of life that others may see as historical are just the day-to-day present of folks who see no reason to race to the grave. In this type of environment, a young 13-year-old boy's predilection for working with metal and crafting knives was greatly encouraged rather than questioned.

"First thing I ever made was a knife—don't know why it was a knife, but I did end up making all kinds of things like pot hooks, stuff like that. I grew up camping, hiking and building fires, so using knives was normal to me," Hoffman recounts. He was an active outdoorsman and motivated to learn and better himself in a wide variety of skills. Like many boys with outdoor inclinations, Liam was very involved with his Boy Scout troop, earning all the badges required to climb the ladder of excellence and reach the coveted Eagle Scout rank.

"Being a Scout didn't necessarily help me with blacksmithing directly, but it taught me about being organized, taking charge..." It was this mastery of focus and organizational skills that helped Hoffman

juggle many activities in high school while developing his blacksmithing skills to such a level that he began selling his first knives while still in school.

Even the most focused and dedicated teens will sometimes lose direction and deviate from their mission when they get to high school. The distractions are many. Most fall off the path when they become misdirected by the two biggest targets to chase: gas fumes and perfumes. Liam, however, continued along his blacksmithing course. In high school, he found a supportive community of friends and teachers who recognized his potential. In fact, some of his biggest fans and buyers were the teachers themselves. Liam says, "I'd have a backpack full of knives, and I'd sell my knives to teachers." At his school, the students and staff already appreciated the master craftsmanship of this ambitious young man and wanted to support, both morally and tangibly, the budding career of a promising blacksmith.

FORGING AHEAD

Liam Hoffman's fame spread beyond the confines of his school and the in-the-know blade community when he was featured on the reality-TV show *Forged in Fire*. For those unacquainted with this popular History Channel show, the format of each episode

"AXES FELL INTO MY LAP, IN A SENSE... I LOVE THE SHAPE AND FUNCTION OF AN AXE AS WELL AS THE WOODWORKING THAT GOES INTO IT."



Much of the shop machinery at Hoffman Blacksmithing is circa-WWII and earlier, bought via auction and lovingly refurbished.



consists of a competition between bladesmiths in three different timed, progressive challenges. Each contestant is tasked with creating a blade with unfamiliar materials in the first round, then finishing his or her knife into a functional weapon in the second round, then finally creating an iconic edged weapon from scratch in the final round. At each step, the bladesmiths are judged by a panel of seasoned knife-makers and weapons experts, and eliminated until only the best remains as the *Forged in Fire* Champion.

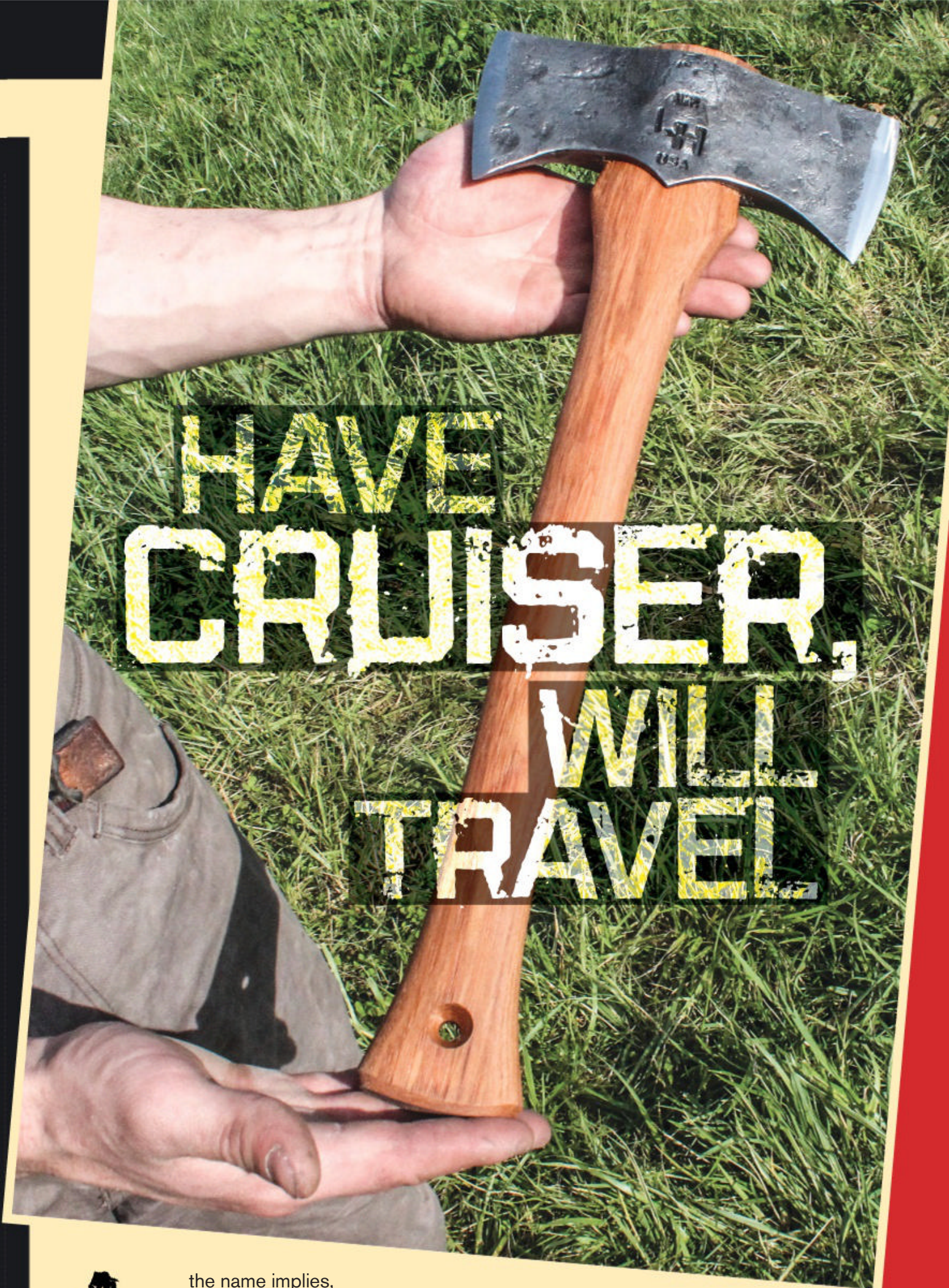
Unbeknownst to avid viewers of this now wildly successful show, Liam was approached several times to appear in the competition. However, he felt he was too inexperienced and young, and his own self-disciplined humility restrained him from entering the fray. Liam was first approached for the show just as he was graduating from high school due to the rising popularity of his knives among collectors of fine blades. "They reached out to me before Season One, before anyone had ever heard of the show," Liam recounts. "They were reaching out to anyone who had anything to do with blacksmithing. I was in high school. I didn't even reply because I didn't know what it was and didn't think I was good enough."

It took two more seasons of prodding from the producers and the cajoling of a good friend to finally get Liam to accept the invitation to audition for the third season. "The selection process to actually get in took almost three months; there was lots of paperwork, Skype interviews and screen tests. We did the filming two days after BLADE Show in 2016, but the show didn't air until September of 2016." Liam went on to become the Season Three *Forged in Fire* Champion, beating out older, more experienced and established bladesmiths with his creation of a traditional Himalayan blade called a Kora sword. This high-profile win gained Liam a wider audience for his superb craftsmanship and gave the already growing Hoffman Blacksmithing an invigorating boost.

"The show really helped us in a long-range game, with people recognizing the brand and me. You definitely can't underplay how much it helped us."

THE SADDLE AXE

Currently, Liam is known for creating some of the best-quality work axes in the field. It has become the main focus of Hoffman



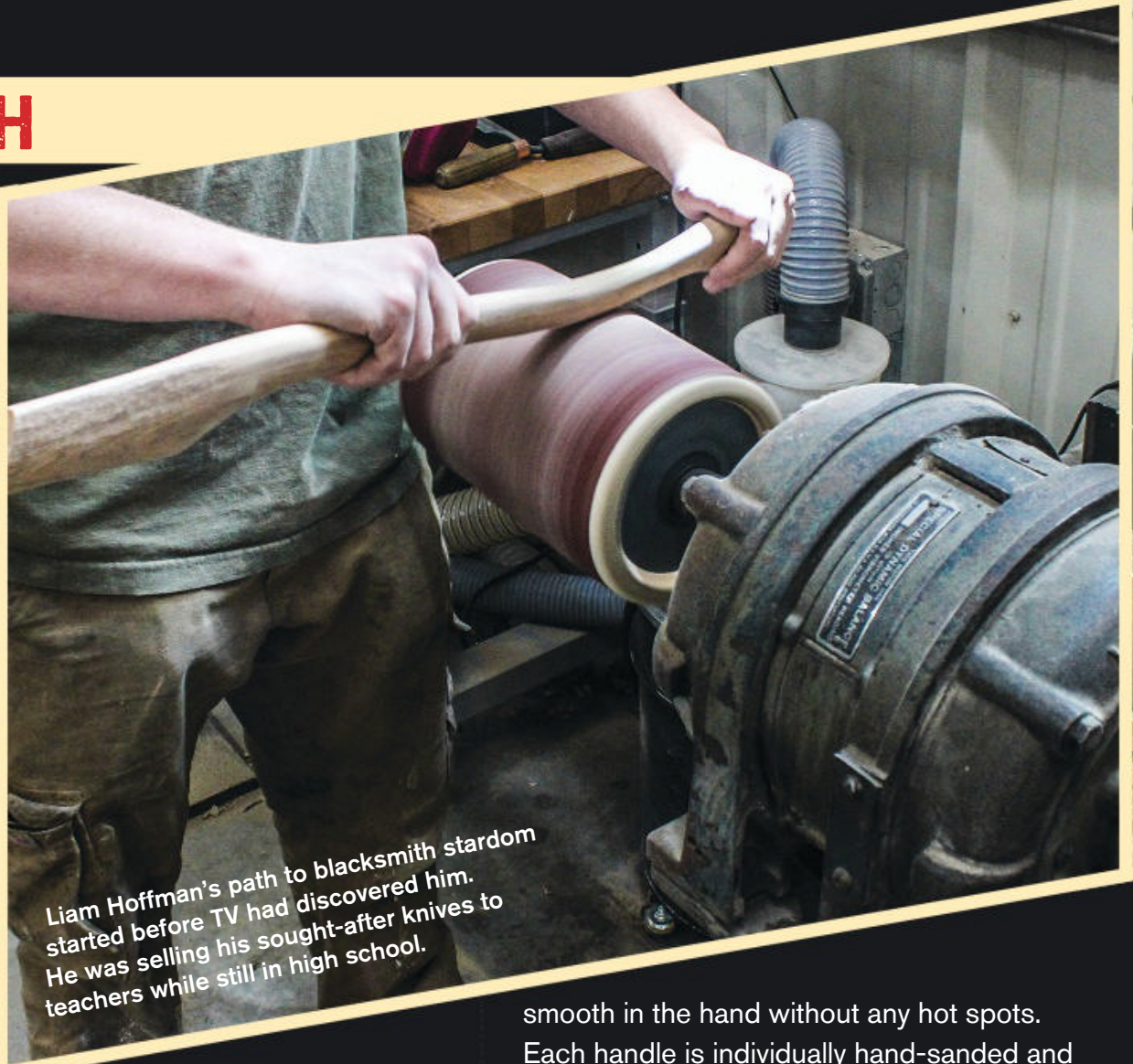
AS the name implies, a saddle axe is a double-bit axe small enough to be carried attached to a horse's saddle but possibly too long or heavy to carry solely as a belt tool. The cruiser axe is a smaller two-bit axe, usually weighing under 3 pounds, that is used by estimators working for timber companies. The job of tree estimators, called "cruisers," is to ride on ahead of tree-harvesting crews and decide which trees are to be cut, making them trailblazers with their

axes. Nowadays, timber cruising is a detailed art involving a broad range of measurements and science-based assessments, and an established code of paint markings is used to communicate the state or quality of the trees. However, the double-bit compact cruiser is still preferred by some forestry personnel as part of their kit for the versatility and portability of the axe.

—Armando Basulto



THE AXE-MAN COMETH



Liam Hoffman's path to blacksmith stardom started before TV had discovered him. He was selling his sought-after knives to teachers while still in high school.

Blacksmithing, and the axes are some of the most sought-after pieces for both collectors and those who use them in the field. "Axes fell into my lap, in a sense," Liam shares. "I love the shape and function of an axe as well as the woodworking that goes into it. Once I began making them, I filled a demand and things took off. Our axes use higher-quality materials and finishes than others."

The Hoffman catalog of axes offers a variety of styles to fit a diverse group of users from casual backpackers to serious forestry workers. Representative of the Hoffman quality is the popular Saddle Axe. This double-bit beauty is deceptively well balanced and compact enough to include in a backpack or, as the name implies, attached to a horse's saddle or, more likely, your belt. These types of axes were originally used by tree specialists who worked in forestry and would ride through timber stands grading and marking trees for harvest, giving the saddle axe its other common name, the cruiser axe.

The two heads of the 2.25-pound Saddle Axe allow the user to utilize one bit for heavy work and save the other bit for finer tasks. The edges will hold their sharpness and shape even after heavy chopping. The axe

head is hand-forged from a solid block of 4142 chrome-moly steel. This low-alloy, chromium-molybdenum steel is renowned for its superior wear resistance, rigidity and good impact resistance, and is heat-treated for exceptional performance in the field. The razor-sharp edge on one of the bits comes ground a little thinner, allowing versatility right out of the box.

The beautifully ergo-dynamically shaped 19-inch handle is made of local North Carolina kiln-dried hickory lumber, straight-grained and

smooth in the hand without any hot spots. Each handle is individually hand-sanded and carved into perfect balance and width. A handle that's too thick will cause quick grip exhaustion, while a too-thin handle can create blister-causing tension in the hand. Hoffman Blacksmithing craftsmen take great care in choosing and shaping each handle to match the axe head. Every stacked piece of hickory is matched and married to its corresponding axe early in the creation process.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Hoffman Blacksmith axes all feel untouched by modern manufacturing machinery. Gripping one of the dense hickory handles and feeling the weight of the axe head transports the wielder to a time of rustic, independent living, where a man's tools meant the difference between honest work or hopeless destitution, food or starvation, living or dying. To walk the workspace of Hoffman Blacksmithing is to note the absence of digital readouts, LEDs or computer-aided manufacturing. The traditional tools of the trade—anvil, hammers and tongs—sit in ordered preparedness at work stations around the shop. Instead of diodes and chips, the machines here are of cast iron and grease, with the clang and cacophony of pistons and gears harkening back to the early Industrial Age.

Each axe is ground, shaped and scrutinized by Liam and his small team of workers. The slightest mismatch of handle to axe head or other failure to meet Hoffman standards results





in the axe being retired from the process. It becomes a “thrower” for Liam and his crew to use for break-time competition. Targets are set up outside for testing and stress relief, and axes of all makes and models are flung to the bullseye. Liam, not unexpectedly, is the reigning company champ.

HOT AND BRIGHT FUTURE

Hoffman Blacksmithing now moves approximately 70 to 100 axes a month while expanding its production to supply other blade- and axe-makers with tools. The hickory handles are so well crafted at the shop that they’re now offered for sale as separate purchases, along with walnut wedges. “My business is growing rapidly and has been for several years. We don’t have any plans to slow it down anytime soon. Catching up on our axe orders is our priority at the moment, but I plan to come out with an array of new products and train and employ skilled craftsman for years to come.”

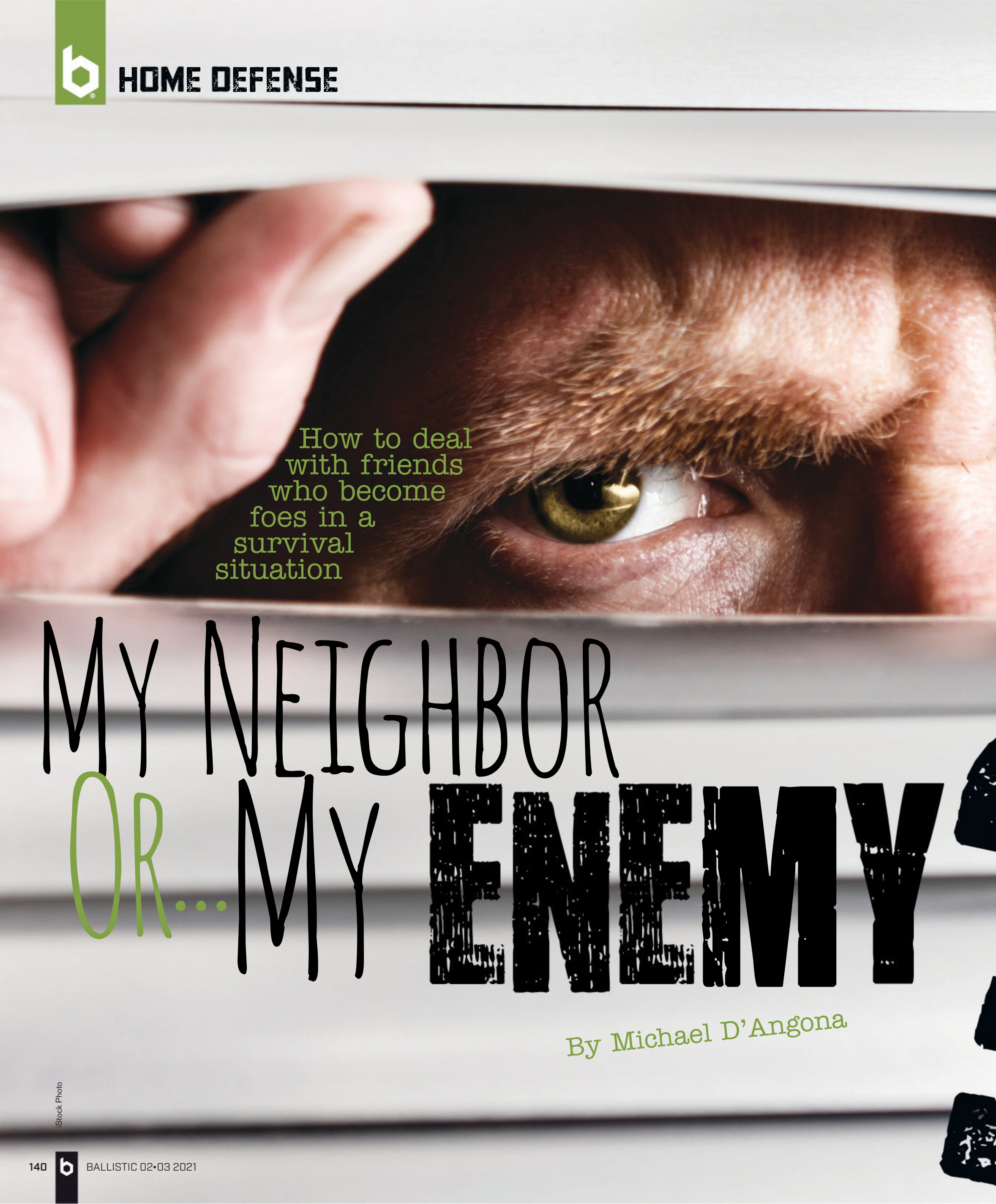
Whatever Liam Hoffman puts his measured touch upon carries a certain craftsman gravitas that comes from years of experience that one would expect from a seasoned blacksmith. The maker and the company work to the standard of their motto: “It is true craftsmanship that transcends technology.” But Liam takes it all in stride, right now setting his sights on becoming an American Bladesmith Society Master Smith before he turns 25 years old, which would make him one of the youngest ever to hold the coveted title. To anyone who has hefted a Hoffman axe, Liam’s future success is not only predictable but inevitable. For more info, visit hoffmanblacksmithing.com. ●



Hoffman Blacksmithing creates several different types of axes, and to many people, one is the same as the other. However, there are critical differences in each style and model that should be taken into account to best match the tool to the job. The terms “axe,” “hatchet” and “camp axe” are sometimes used interchangeably, but in reality, they are three different tools, each with its own niche in a bushcraft-er’s or survivalist’s tool kit.

The typical axe is a longer-handled chopping tool meant for felling larger trees or chopping through larger logs. The generous axe head and cutting surface on these larger tools coupled

with the ability to be wielded two-handed for maximum power, makes this the “big boy” for getting some serious lumberjacking done. In contrast, the hatchet is a smaller axe that’s meant to be used with one hand, freeing the other hand to manipulate the cutting surface. The smaller size of the hatchet allows it to do double duty as a hammer or mallet because of the flattened surface on the rear of the axe head. The ubiquitous camp axe that most backpackers tote on the outside of their pack frames are meant to be a combination of a big-woods axe and small hatchet. —Armando Basulto



How to deal
with friends
who become
foes in a
survival
situation

MY NEIGHBOR OR... MY ENEMY

By Michael D'Angona

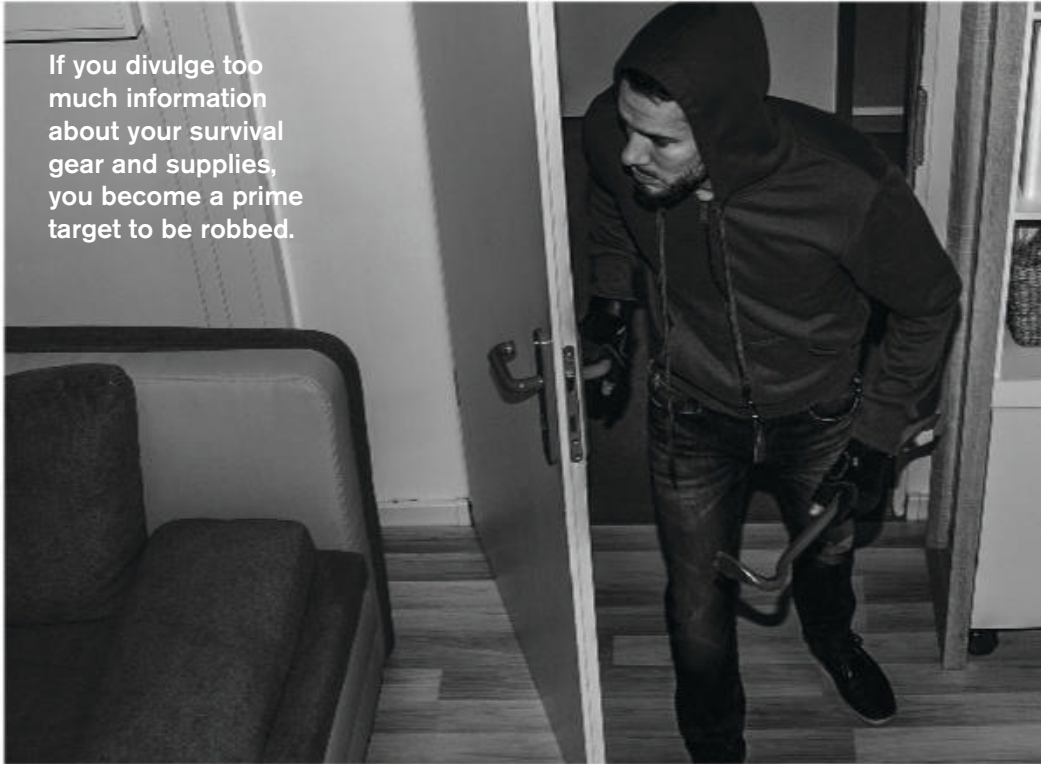
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If you divulge too much information about your survival gear and supplies, you become a prime target to be robbed.



"Keep your gear inside your home and not "on display" in your garage."

When it comes to survival preparation, there is no doubt plenty to do. With the plethora of possible scenarios, the numbers of potential natural and man-made emergencies are overwhelming. From Mother Nature's wrath in the form of hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis, wildfires and more, to the malevolent hand of man delivering electromagnetic pulse (EMP) strikes, biological weapons and the threat of global war, a person's hands are definitely full in trying to prepare for them all.

However, as variable as these situations may seem, there is one common thread that runs throughout all of them, and that's the uncertainty of how *other* people around you will react to such threats.

More often than not, other people may not have prepared, or even have *thought* to prepare for a crisis. The "it could never happen here or happen to me" mindset is common among the vast majority of people, and because of this, you could be in very real danger from a source that you may have never considered.

But, as you prepare for nearly everything, you can also prepare to deal with your fellow man. Who was once your friend will undoubt-

edly become your enemy, when they have less than you do, without a plan in place and when their entire world is turned upside down.

The following describes how you can handle this seldom-considered and possibly life-threatening situation.

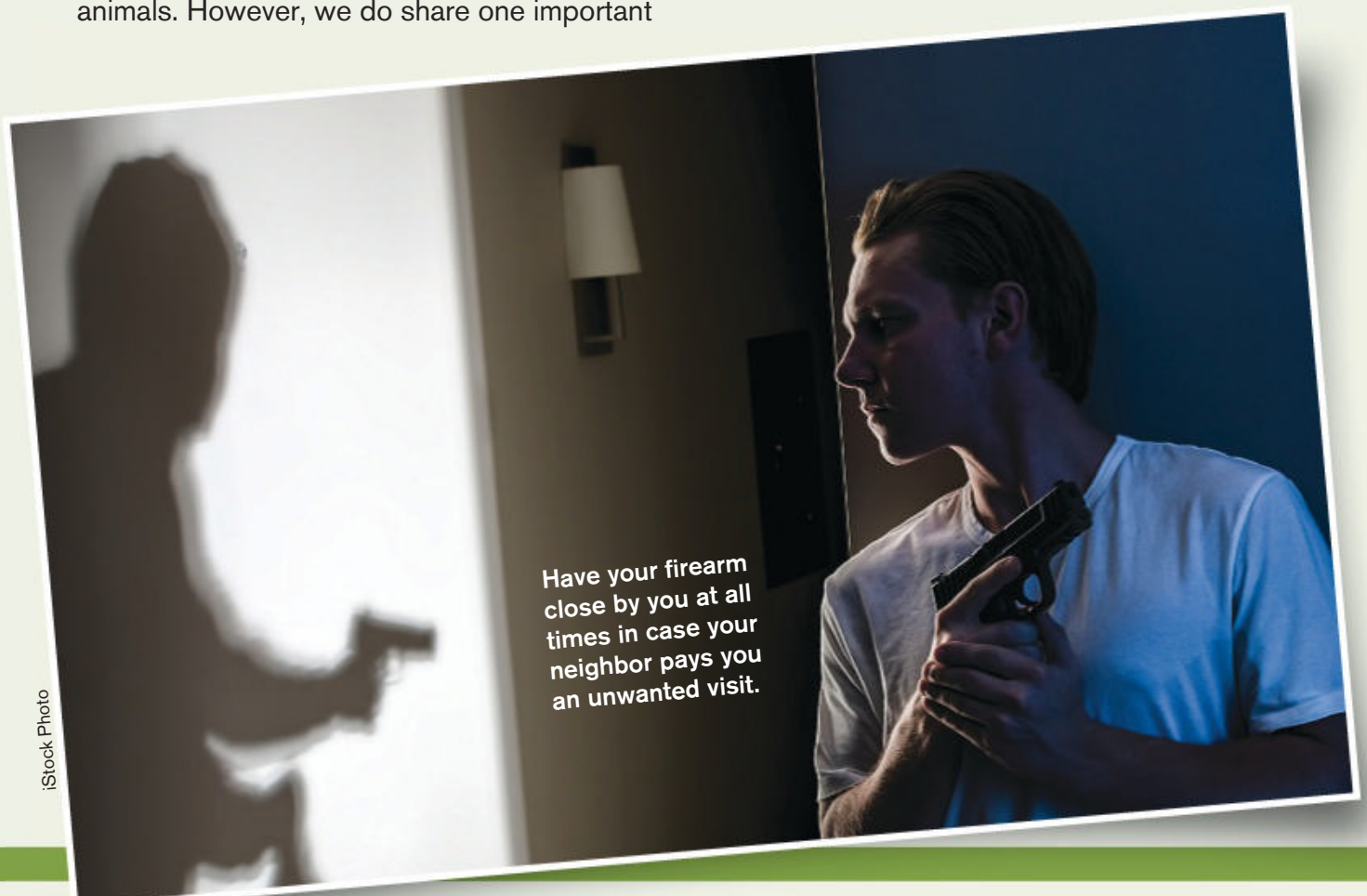
NATURAL INSTINCTS

In many people's minds, especially with all our advances in technology, medicine and organized social interactions, we are far superior to the millions of animals on this planet. This is both correct and incorrect at the same time.

Yes, we do live far differently than the animals. However, we do share one important

characteristic—and that is the will to live. The natural, innate instinct to survive is buried deep within each person, and only truly comes out when a life-threatening scenario unfolds and the possibility of dying because of it comes to the forefront of that person's mind.

Almost immediately upon this happening, the basic needs of man (and woman, of course) take priority over all other things. "What will we eat?" "What if there is no food, no water?" "Where will we live if our house gets destroyed?" "Where will we go?" These are questions that can instantly take precedence over all others, and as such, a person then attempts to go to the next stage, which



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SNEAKY STORAGE

Stealth Furniture (stealthfurniture.com) offers cabinets, tables and other furnishings ideal for keeping your gear and weapons hidden from others. Designed to be both beautiful and functional, the items listed here represent just a sample of what's available. Stealth Furniture has pieces for your living room, bedroom and entry area, along with accessories—all made in the USA. —Michael D'Angona

25-INCH SIDE TABLE: This innocent-looking table houses a secret—a dual-entry hidden storage area. Because it's equipped with an RFID lock or wireless keypad, you'll be the only one who knows what's inside, as you stock small gear, handguns and ammo. No one will be the wiser, and your gear will be safe from prying eyes.

26-INCH TWO-DRAWER END TABLE: No one will look twice at this common piece of furniture, but you'll know the secret. With the use of an electronic key, the top portion slides away to reveal a roomy containment section, useful for handguns or just about any item you want to keep safe and secure. In the front, two traditional drawers hold common goods to throw off any would-be thief.

16x20 PICTURE FRAME/MIRROR SHADOW BOX: Available in three finishes or custom colors, this inconspicuous mirror houses enough space inside for small personal items, including handguns, knives and other weapons or valuables. The unit comes complete with RFID lock and offers optional accessories, such as foam magnets, fireproof bags and fire containment bags.

QUEEN-SIZED HEADBOARD: Five secret compartments and a remote-control device assist in hiding your full-sized rifles, handguns and other gear and weapons. There is a main compartment, two drop-down internal compartments and two leg compartments, all ideal for your larger pieces of survival and self-defense gear and personal valuables.





MY NEIGHBOR...OR MY ENEMY?

is to find solutions, and that means they might turn to you—or turn on you.

The will to live is so great that theft, destruction and the infliction of physical harm on another, even to the point of killing, may occur at the hands of your “fellow man” if the situation becomes extremely dire. The “right thing to do” is overshadowed by “do what needs to be done to survive.”

In the wild, animals, particularly mothers protecting their young, will fight violently to keep their offspring safe or to feed them when food is scarce. Bloody battles can ensue against others of their kind, often resulting in maimed or killed participants.

Unfortunately, many people find this concept difficult to grasp, and they can be taken by surprise when it actually happens to them. So enforced are the ways of “civilized man” in today’s society that the reality of survival of the fittest is for all intents a foreign concept.

KIND NEIGHBOR?

During times of peace and tranquility, interacting with your neighbors can be a very rewarding experience. They can look out for your property when you’re away from home for extended periods of time. They can retrieve and hold your mail until you return, and they can be

sources of trading tools when you both have very specific around-the-house projects to do.

However, when times go bad, and food, water, supplies and fuel become scarce, your friendly neighbor next door can rapidly turn into your enemy. What they don’t have they will get by any means possible when their own survival or their family’s is at risk. This means you are a natural target, especially if you have gone into great detail during more peaceful times about your prepping skills, your food and water caches, and your overall plan if all hell breaks loose.

The easiest way to avoid physical conflict with your neighbors who are out to take your stuff is simply to keep all your survival or emergency plans secreted away from prying eyes. Keep your gear inside your home and not “on display” in your garage. Utilize your interior closet space, and your attic or your

basement if you have them. Bug-out bags (yes, you should have more than one per family member) can be stuffed into your vehicle’s trunk, while your primary bags can be stored in your bedroom closet, close enough to grab during an unpredicted crisis. Slow and steady stocking of food, water and gear into your home is much better than buying all at once and creating a “show” for the neighborhood as you lug everything from your car to your home.

The key to not becoming an instant target lies in projecting the image of *not* being prepared for the unexpected. This concerns not only gear, but also your overall frame of mind if something does happen. If you act panicked, scared or extremely worried, as most other people would during an unexpected emergency, you’ll likely fool those around you and avoid possibly violent confrontations.

RAPID ESCALATION

The timeline from the initial mention of a possible emergency to the situation “hitting home” escalates rapidly, so much so that it may very well take you by surprise and cause you great harm.

For example, during a hurricane, the storm may be a full week out at sea before it reaches land. During that time, some people may prepare, while others may be nonchalant and wait until it gets closer. Those who wait may not be prepared at all, and these are the people you need to be concerned about. If they are directly in the hurricane’s path, panic will set in rapidly. The media will report the most dramatic news, further escalating the situation.

Unprepared people will scour the neighborhood for food, which may be almost depleted, and water, which will most likely be gone. Fuel will probably already be unavailable from most gas stations. Knowing this, they will do whatever is necessary to keep themselves and their families safe, and that means taking what they need from others, by force if necessary. The will to survive will overcome any social and moral norms. Physical force, including killing others if they must, must not be ruled out in this type of scenario.

Always keep this information in mind when disaster strikes. Timelines may be different depending upon the crises, but the universal fact is that, as a situation worsens, the possibility of conflict with others increases

“More often than not, other people may not have prepared, or even have thought to prepare for a crisis.”



istock Photos

proportionately. Know this and avoid being out in public during this “danger zone” time period.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

What can be done to avoid becoming a target for those around you as a dangerous situation gains ground, both figuratively in the minds of others and literally as the natural disaster, pandemic or other crisis gets closer? The best defense against this is to be both subtle and secretive with your preparations.

As mentioned earlier, don't prepare excessively over a limited period of time. This essentially means that buying a few items over a long period is less likely to attract unwanted attention from others. If you shop every week or two, be sure to add some food, water, gear or tools to your normal assortment. Over time your cache will fill up and help you be ready for an unpredictable future.

Another possibility is to buy some items on the Internet and have them shipped to you. With online purchasing at an all-time high, seeking out and receiving the supplies you require is an easy task. With just a click or two, you can have long-term food options, water pouches, shelter gear, communication devices, first-aid kits and just about anything else you can think of sent straight to your home. If you stagger your deliveries over weeks or even months, your growing accumulation of survival and emergency goods will appear to be just normal, everyday packages sitting on your doorstep.

TRUST NO ONE

When a crisis hits, unfortunately the best avenue to take with neighbors and friends (and even family in some cases) is to trust no one. As conditions worsen and supplies begin to get scarce, all bets are off. The ability of people to feed themselves and their families, have medical supplies if they're sick or injured, drink fresh water and have everyday tools and gear to allow them to live another day will take precedence over everything else, even if that means you will suffer because of it. Ultimately, it may not be a hurricane, pandemic, tsunami or EMP that takes you out—it may very well be your “buddy” next door. ●



BUSTED NOW WHAT?

Okay, you've been stealthy and followed every precaution, but sometimes things just go awry. In this case, your neighbor may have caught on to your stashes of gear and survival staples. Here are some approaches to take when confronted.

DENY EVERYTHING. Lie straight to his (or her) face. Simple enough. Be convincing enough to make them rethink what they saw. With enough denial on your end, they might very well leave you alone.

TALK IT THROUGH. Calm down, don't react aggressively, just try to talk it through. Downplay your preps and try to convince your neighbor that it's really no big deal. Explaining your “extra stuff” calmly and directly may take the edge off your heated friend next door.

BARTER, TO BRING PEACE. If your neighbor won't back down with calm talk, it's time to barter. With you, more often than not, possibly having a greater amount of gear than you need, toss your neighbor some of your duplicates or less important items. Odds are they won't know the difference, and you could very well end up with a good trade on your end.

PREPARE FOR A FIGHT. When all else fails, a physical conflict could arise. Know this and be prepared for it. Carry a weapon on you at all times, and do what you have to do to protect your family and your supplies. Strategically placed weapons inside your home will make sneak attacks easier to confront and ultimately overcome. —Michael D'Angona

PIT BOSSING

PUT YOURSELF
ON THE ROAD TO
BBQ'ING THE BEST
MEAT EVER

BY ANDY GROSSMAN



A man's pit is a holy thing. It is a reflection of his taste and soul. If you are like me, you don't want anyone else touching your pit.

BBQ is an art, and every pit master has his own style, techniques and flavors. This is what I love so much about BBQ. There is really no right way to BBQ or smoke something. Everyone has their own techniques, flavors and methods. If you are new to BBQ, there are a few things you are going to need to get started.





It is important to have the proper tools to achieve the very best-tasting BBQ possible. The large, simple to use RecTeq RT-700 used in conjunction with the RecTeq ICER is an incredible pairing for handling all of the author's BBQ needs.



Having an abundance of grill space on your pit is always a good thing, even if you normally only cook for two people. You just never know what else you might want to put on the cooking surface or when you might have surprise guests that require a lot of meat to satisfy their nearly insatiable BBQ appetites.

BBQ PIT NOTES

Not all pits are created equally. I don't do a lot of regular grilling so we are going to focus more on smokers as our cooker rather than a normal grill. I do, however, believe in having both so you have options for your cookouts.

I started off on a basic charcoal kettle-style grill. It was inexpensive and it worked great for grilling. Although it can be done, a charcoal kettle grill is not great for smoking. They get very hot and are very hard to add fuel to during your cook. Plus, it is nearly impossible to regulate the temperature. I still have that original kettle grill, though, and use it often for grilling when I want that charcoal flavor and a quick meal. I then got a gas smoker, which is very simple to use. Most have a water tray and a wood chip box. You soak your wood chips so they smoke and don't burn, then you

Monitoring temperature is critical, so you'll need to invest in a solid thermometer. Nobody likes the guy who cooks meat to shoe-leather status.

put them in your wood box, which sits over the burner. Gas smokers work well and make it a bit easier to regulate temps. You do have to really pay attention to the wood box and make sure it doesn't run out. Plus, they are not well insulated and have trouble staying at temp in cold weather. You can also get electric smokers that work pretty much the same as the gas smoker while utilizing electricity as your fuel source.

One of the most common and best smokers out there are stick burners. A stick burner uses real wood and fire, normally in a separate chamber away from the cooking surface. This gives you excellent indirect heat and all the smoke you want. I love stick burners, however they do take longer to start up and they require constant babysitting to be sure your temps stay where you want them. If that fire goes out, you're in trouble.

The last choice out there is pellet smokers. Pellet smokers are fairly newer to the market. They utilize wood pellets that

feed from a hopper into a fire chamber. Pellet grills provide very similar flavors to stick burners but without the hassle of babysitting it. You can literally turn a pellet smoker on, set a temp and it pretty much sits at that temperature the entire cook. For this reason, when I went out searching for a new cooker, I decided on the Recteq RT-700 Pellet grill. This thing not only looks awesome, which is very important when showing off your pit to your friends and neighbors, but the Recteq has some incredible features that I didn't know I needed until I started using them.

Recteq's RT-700 is focused on flavor, convenience and versatility. I cook a lot; I needed a grill that would last, and this thing is built to last. Pellet grills offer better flavor than charcoal and are more convenient than gas. I have been able to bake, smoke, sear and grill, all with the push of a button. The Recteq even has built-in WiFi so once I throw some meat on the smoker, I can pretty much forget about it and adjust temps right from my phone. The RT-700 even has a built-in light inside the cook chamber for those early morning starts. This thing is



about as close to perfection as I have ever seen in a smoker, but be ready for the price tag of \$1,200.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Now that you have your smoker, there are a few must-have accessories you'll need. The second most important thing is your thermometers. I say that plural because you need a few thermometers. This whole game is about temperatures—the temp of your smoker and the temp of your meat. My Recteq came with two temperature probes, which show up on my app as well, but I don't really trust them. I do use them but always have a back-up. For this task I rely on my Thermoworks Signals 4 channel thermometer. The Signals is also wireless and connects to my phone with its very own app. This will tell me my temps of whatever I want during a cooking session. I normally put a probe in each item I have on the smoker at the time and one just above the grates to monitor actual chamber temps. Thermoworks makes some of the most accurate thermometers on the market, and the app for the signals is just awesome. It records your cooking sessions so you can look back and remember your temps and cook times. I also have a Thermoworks ThermoPen MK4, which is a super accurate, extremely fast single-probe thermometer for checking quick temps in your food.

You are also going to need a good set of grilling utensils, some tongs, spatulas and forks, as well as knives for trimming fat and cutting your masterpiece when the cooking is done. Pick up plenty of foil and foil pans, also. You are going to need these for different cookouts.

Spices and rubs are also very important. I found that a good rub can make or break your cook. I use rubs and spices from Frag Out Flavor. They are an American veteran-owned company that makes some very unique and absolutely incredible spice blends. They have a spice that will work for literally anything and everything you are cooking.

The last thing I highly recommend is a good cooler. I know, this isn't a normal

thing you think about when you think about BBQing, but trust me, it is important. Smoking low and slow isn't only about the time the meat is in the cook chamber, but also about the rest period off the heat. I do my briskets a little hotter for about 6 hours and then I pull them off and let them rest in a cooler for about 4 hours or so. Rest period is how you get super juicy meats. I use my Recteq ICER for the rest period. It is a perfect size and retains heat very well, but the air vents allow it to still breathe a bit. Plus, it is made out of food-grade materials, and that's always a good thing when you're dealing with food.

PARTING POINTERS

Remember, there is no wrong way to cook and no wrong pit to use. It is an art, and you are the artist. Grab yourself a good cut of meat and practice your methods, learn your pit, understand your temps and play with different spice combos. Get out of your comfort zone and stop just burning some basic old burgers on the grill. Make a masterpiece, then sit back and watch the masses drool and beg for more. ●



“THIS WHOLE GAME IS ABOUT TEMPERATURES—BOTH THE TEMP OF YOUR SMOKER AND THE TEMP OF YOUR MEAT.”



FOR MORE INFORMATION

RECTEQ
recteq.com

THERMOWORKS
thermoworks.com

FRAG OUT FLAVOR
fragoutflavor.com



BBQ tends to become a lifestyle, and you just never know where it might take you. Competition BBQ can become a very fun and addictive hobby for many who want to take it to the next level. Plus, good BBQ can make you an extremely popular person amongst your friends and family members.

SMOKE HOUSE



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The author considers the pork butt (actually from the pig's shoulder) to be the Holy Grail of swine, yielding delicious meat when smoked correctly.

and if that's all it takes to help a farmer out, I'm their man. As of this writing, I have two freezers full of ribs, thick-cut bacon, sausage, chops, hams, hoofs and every bit of the pig that's edible.

In my case, "doing my part" means not only buying a few pigs and encouraging you to do it, but serving up a pork recipe for you, too.

HOW ABOUT THAT BUTT?

The Holy Grail of swine (in my opinion) is the pork butt. The misleadingly named hunk of meat is not actually from the backside of a pig; rather it's from the front shoulder. You'll see it used in almost every barbecue joint, served as pulled pork. Eons ago in culinary school, we students were introduced to this cut because it's damn near impossible to screw up. While it is true that the muscle has a lot of connective tissue that needs to be broken down through "low and slow" cooking, it also has a significant amount of fat, so it's less prone to dry out, even at higher temperatures.

Disclaimer: I know how barbeque connoisseurs hold their swine sacred, and I'm not about to go down that rabbit hole and suggest that this recipe is better than the next. But it's good, and that's all that matters.

PREPARATION KEYS

If, indeed, you buy straight from the source, ask the processor/butcher to remove the skin from the butt/shoulder. I personally like dry rubs, especially for the bark. The "bark" (for those that don't know) is the dark, crusty outer layer of a finished piece of meat. When the interactions between the spices, the fat, moisture and the

I LIKE PIG BUTT

AND I CAN NOT LIE!

BY J. MARSHALL

With confidence I say that 2020 sucked ass. In fact, I think anyone with a heart can say that.

Any one person in this world has felt the wrath of 2020, whether directly or indirectly. Here in the Midwest, we feel the pain like everyone else...and then some. In a region full of cattle ranchers and pig farmers, the effects can drop a grown man to his knees. And it has—feedlots are empty, meat packing plants closed, farmers euthanizing their pigs

because they have no room, no money and no place to ship them. All of this directly affects us (at least us that indulge in meat). It's devastating.

I can't reverse this, but I can do my part. I've bought three pigs since the pandemic started, and not from the store, but from the source. All the farmer wants for his pigs is to be put to use and hopefully break even. A whole, full-grown hog cost me \$120 and \$100 to be processed. That's \$220 for a year's worth of pork? That's unheard of,

smoke all come together, it's truly one of life's greatest pleasures. My dry rub is fairly simple to create using the following:

- **Brown sugar**
- **Coarse Kosher salt**
- **Coarse black pepper**
- **Just a pinch of coffee**
- **Cumin**
- **Onion powder**
- **Garlic powder**
- **Cayenne pepper**

I don't like ratios or measuring, but for the sake of argument do 1-to-1 brown sugar to everything else. You need to be liberal with your rub, you can't put too much on. Trust me, the more the better. The fat side of the butt is the side everyone sees on the grill; so apply the rub on this side last. Typically, the novice will take the newly rubbed butt straight to the smoker. *Don't!* Let the butt rest; let it sit for at least an hour.

BUTT SMOKING

There are a million smokers out there; I choose Traeger, and they make life so much easier. Regardless, when you're ready to smoke your butt, have the smoker at a consistent 260 degrees (for those with wood burning smokers, make sure the smoke is clean). The total smoke time is 10 hours. Patience is needed, so don't open the smoker for at least 3.5 hours. When you do, prepare to "spritz" the butt with whatever suits your fancy: beer, water, wine, or what I like to use—cider vinegar. Spritz generously, close lid and spritz two more times in a five-hour time period.

This last step is what separates the rookie from the pro. After about 8 or so hours, wrap that butt up in tinfoil, throw it back on the grill and let smoke for another hour or so at 300 degrees. Again, don't worry about the higher heat, there's enough fat and juices flowing

With agricultural operations suffering greatly across the country, buying pork straight from a farmer is not only the right thing to do, it's also the patriotic thing to do.



that your butt will be fine.

Pull the butt off the smoker and let it "rest" in the foil for about 45 minutes to one hour.

SERVING YOUR BUTT

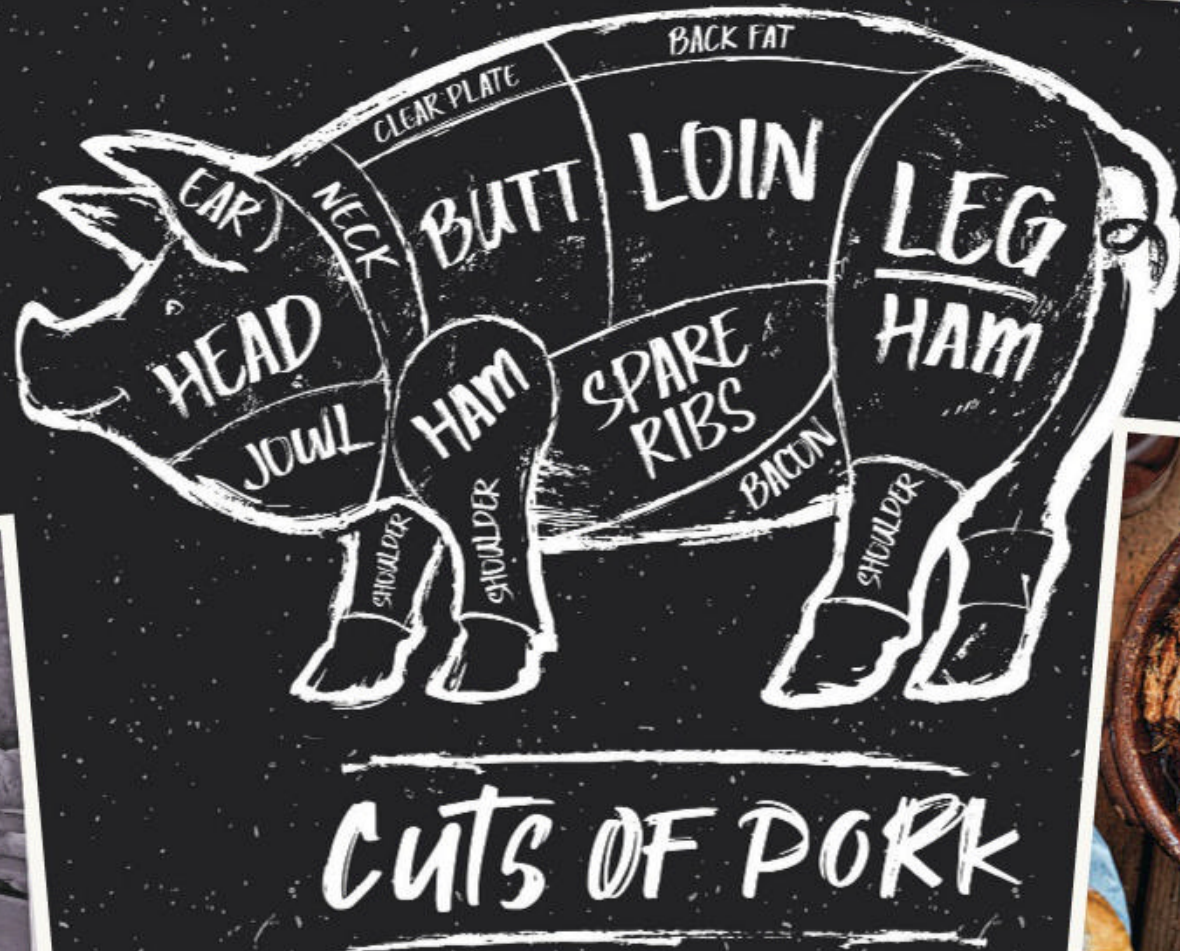
First and foremost, when you unwrap the butt, make sure nobody is around. Start picking at the bark and shove it in your mouth. It's your victory; you get to reap the rewards.

When you unwrap the butt, make sure not to let the juices spill out of the foil. Pull the butt out of foil and shred with your fingers or a large fork. Dump the juices from the foil over the shredded pork.

EATING YOUR BUTT

Everyone knows that for barbecue, it's a personal choice how you eat it and what sauce you use (if any). Personally, I like Carolina barbeque sauce; it's the vinegar and the tanginess, thereof. Also, I'm not a fan of squirting sauce all over my masterpiece that I just spent over 10 hours preparing. Rather, I like a big old bowl of warm Carolina sauce on the side and dip my pork into it. But again, it's a personal thing; do what makes you happy.

And being happy right now is as important as it will ever be. If anything, I'm happy that I helped a farmer out, albeit in a very small way. ●



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MAD BAR BOUT

He is the epitome of suave and cool inside of a custom-tailored tuxedo. He jets around the world balancing a life of battling international criminal master minds and tangoing with sultry *femme fatales*. He is the original most interesting man in the world.

This was my impression of James Bond since my earliest days of 007 movies. It seemed that there was nothing Bond could not do. I mean, the guy had an Aston Martin with machine guns, for goodness sakes! Then came the day that will live forever in my mind. This was the day later in my life when I sat down with my dinner, came across *Goldfinger* in my movie menu and sat back to revel in all things Bond. Part way through the movie, the words screeched out of the television like an emergency siren, "Shaken not stirred."

Wait, what did James just say? He distinctly ordered his martini shaken, not stirred. It was at that moment that I realized 007 was human and had clearly ordered his martini wrong.

Because of this moment, I did some research and found that the ripple effect of 007's shaken martini had become a cultural phenomenon. There were countless articles suggesting you order it shaken to be seen as a connoisseur of cool. All I could see was countless people walking up to a bar and, in comparison, ordering Jell-O with their caviar. To add to Bond's clear violation of martini prep, he also orders it with vodka as opposed to the original and proper spirit, gin. At that point, I felt like it was my moral responsibility



to pen a piece reaching out to my brothers and sisters in booze and help shake them out of their celluloid hypnosis.

What's In the Drink?

Let us begin with the ingredients and move on to the physics lesson later. The martini is a timeless classic. The origin of the martini is contested, but it is generally accepted to have been concocted in the mid-1800s during the California gold rush. Its calling card was a refreshing cool drink with a well-balanced flavor. The original (and correct) recipe calls for gin and vermouth. Nothing more is needed, other than possibly a sliver of lemon peel. The type of gin you choose does affect the overall taste for the martini. Gins such as Beefeater London Dry come in at about 94 proof or 47%

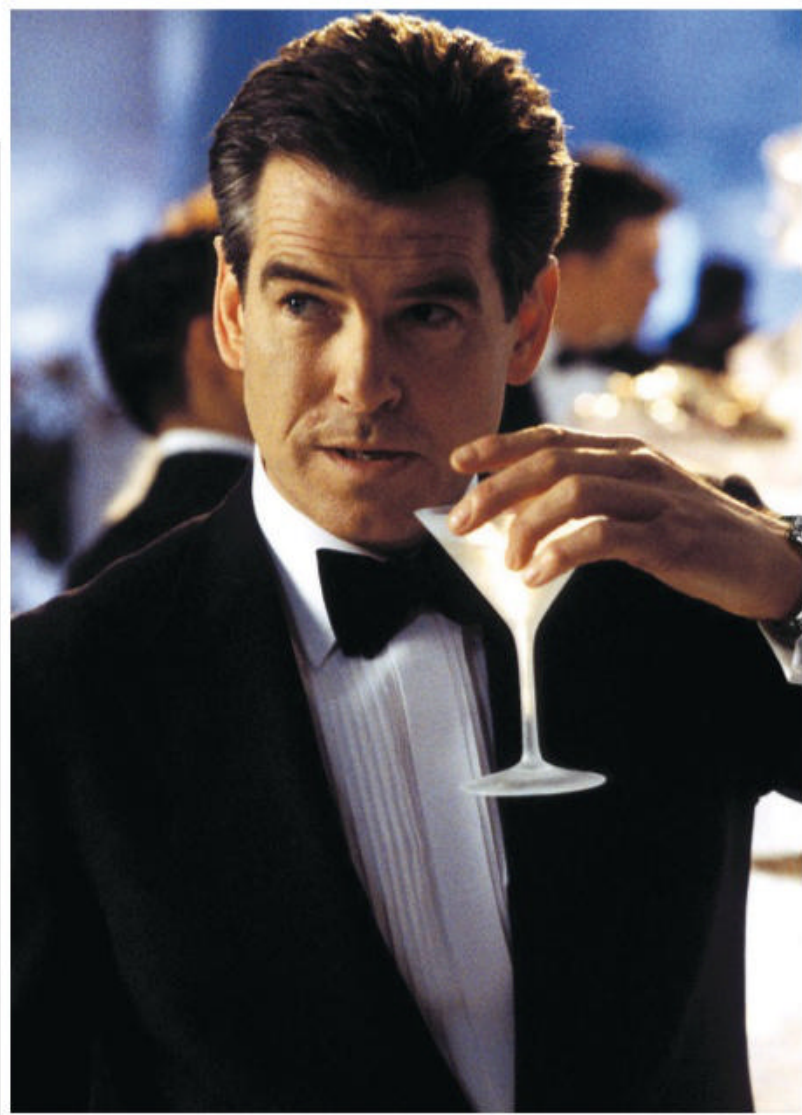
Martinis

IT'S TIME TO CALL OUT 007 ON HOW SCREWED UP HE ORDERED HIS FAMOUS DRINK

By Fred Mastison



With the propensity to order his martini completely wrong, it's a wonder James Bond ever got a date!



alcohol by volume. While tasty in other applications, martinis made with these more potent gins have a much harsher taste and mouth feel. While some prefer their martini with a bit of an afterburner kick, I believe it takes away from the subtlety of the drink. With that being said, I enjoy Bombay Dry gin. It is about 86 proof and has less burn than stronger options. It allows me to taste the diverse botanicals such as juniper in the drink. As always, the choice is yours. Experimentation is encouraged.

The second ingredient is vermouth. This elixir is an aromatized wine with herbs, spices, barks, flowers, seeds, roots and other botanicals, fortified with distilled alcohol to keep it from spoiling quickly. Believed to be one of the oldest forms of alcoholic libation, vermouth gets its name from *wermut*, the German word for wormwood. Yes, vermouth is in fact a drink in and of itself. Generally, there are two main types of vermouth: sweet and dry. Responding to demand and competition, vermouth manufacturers have created additional styles, including extra-dry white, sweet white, red, amber and rosé. For the purpose of this piece, we will just look at sweet and dry. Once again it comes down to the taste you prefer. Personally, I prefer a dry martini as, once again, it allows me to enjoy the flavors. Some take the "dry martini" a bit far and essentially do little more than look at a bottle of vermouth and call it good. What you end up with however is a glass of gin disguised as a martini. I suggest we drop the cliché and build a drink that we can enjoy.

Garnish Truths

The last thing we will touch on ingredient-wise are garnishes. My preferred garnish is a twist of lemon peel, squeezed over the surface of the drink to release its oils. There are other items, however, that have somehow found their way into our precious martini. The most prevalent are green olives. It is my belief that this is nothing more than a conspiracy by the olive industry to make us believe olives actually belong in martinis. I am onto them, however, and am here to tell you that they do not belong. Some have taken to adding a soupçon of the olive brine and calling it a dirty martini. The fact that is called a dirty martini should tell you everything. The last items I see from time to time are frozen Spanish cocktail onions. I will save you the flourish of verbs and nouns by

"So, in Bond's honor I raise a toast to him every June 19 as we celebrate National Martini Day."



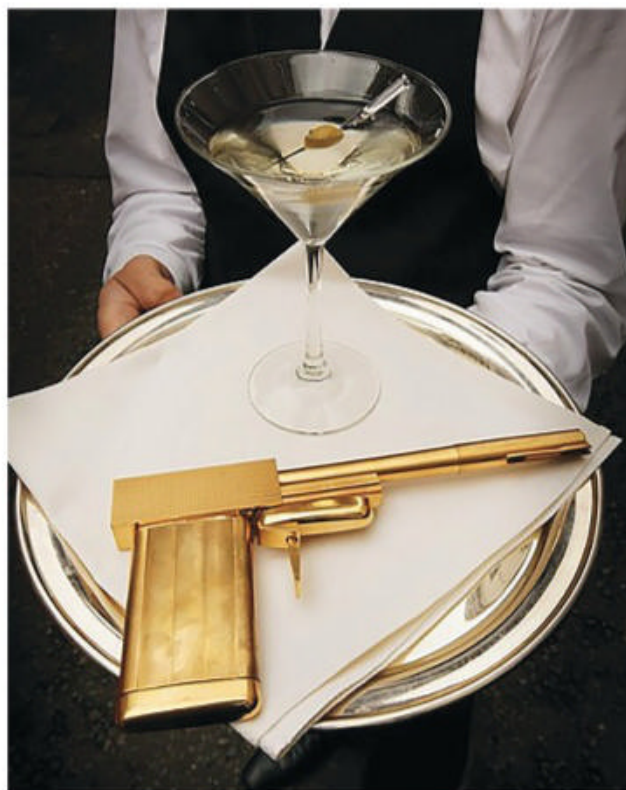
SERVES
001

YOU'LL NEED

- 4 parts gin (or adjust ratio to suit your own taste)
- 1 part chilled dry vermouth
- 1 strip of lemon peel
- Ice

Directions

- Put the martini glass in the freezer along with the gin and chill for at least half an hour.
- Half fill a mixing glass with ice and add the gin and vermouth.
- Stir for 30 seconds, touching the glass as little as possible to keep it cold, then strain into the chilled glass.
- Twist the lemon over the top of the drink, then wipe it around the rim of the glass and drop it in.
- Serve immediately.



simply saying, "Stop it!" Ladies and gentlemen, we are ultimately trying to make a fantastic martini; not a bar snack.

Forget The Shake

Now on to the shaken martini. It is my wholehearted belief that martinis should be stirred and not shaken. First, why would we shake a martini to begin with? Well, a good martini is cold. And by cold, I mean arctic polar bear in the background cold. If it is not cold, it will lack any sort of refreshing qualities, and also the warmer the drink, the more you will taste the harsh, fiery notes of the alcohol. One of the quickest ways to accomplish this is by shaking the mix with ice. This takes about half the time to cool as opposed to stirring, but there is a cost. The violent motion of shaking adds air bubbles to our drink, as well as diluting it more than it should. The minute your ice-filled drink leaves the bartender's hand, it is dying a quick death. The reason for this is that alcohol brings the freezing temperature of water down significantly. This causes accelerated melting of the ice and ultimately a diluted martini.

The solution is to chill the glass, the gin and the vermouth before we ever begin. We will still use ice, but only for about 30 seconds to chill the drink even more. Once we have our components in the mix we stir in a very specific way. The technique is to hold the spoon about halfway between the handle's end and the lip of the mixing glass. We gently insert the spoon and stir slowly. You should try to keep the back of the spoon pressed against the mixing



glass as you stir. This technique will keep the cocktail smooth and velvety, rather than adding in unwanted air. It generally only takes about 30 seconds to bring the drink to its perfect consistency and temperature.

Finally

I know there are some out there who prefer their martinis with vodka, and then shaken. That, my friends, is not a martini. In my time I have seen other more curious versions that include items such as amaretto. What this tells me is that you do not really like martinis and are desperately searching for a way to change the flavor. Know that it is OK to not care for martinis. No single drink is good to everyone. If you are in the martini club however, I suggest that you try it the traditional way. I believe you will enjoy it. As Joe Bullmore put it, "Never in the field of human drinking—to paraphrase one of the cocktail's greatest advocates—has so much been debated by so many over so little. Just two humble ingredients, served in a chilled glass. The Martini is barely a cocktail—and yet somehow it has become a religion of its most famous apostles, and the rituals, commandments and ceremonies they observe."

I must admit that I forgave 007 for his alcohol indiscretion. He is still the king of smooth. Nobody is perfect and, in the end, it is all Ian Fleming's fault. So, in Bond's honor I raise a toast to him every June 19 as we celebrate National Martini Day. While his order is not traditional, he has kept what could have been an obscure drink in the cool kid's club. ●

NIGHT

WINTER IS STILL LINGERING, BUT YOU ARE GOING CRAZY IN THE HOUSE AND DECIDE TO TAKE YOUR QUARANTINE INTO NATURE FOR THE WEEKEND. BUT IT SURE GETS DARK UP IN THEM HILLS! HERE ARE SOME OF MY FAVORITE THINGS TO KEEP YOU AND YOUR GEAR IN SHAPE WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN.

FENIX LIGHTING HT18 AND PD35

◀ In my childhood house there was the “bottom drawer” in the kitchen. It was basically a sad assortment of things that had wandered into the house from the garage. There were random batteries, a few Allen keys, a crusty roll of painters tape, a plastic yellow hammer, a mismatched driver and socket set, etc. Also, there was the cracked plastic flashlight with a large red thumb switch. The light took C batteries, and was almost useful if you had to find something in the back of the pantry, but God help you if you had to go outside at night for some important reason. One evening after I stepped on a cactus and cut my head on a tree branch while trying to track down my mom’s escaped house cat, I swore to myself to always have proper lighting at hand.

Below are two of my favorite options for turning night into day.

Fenix’s HT18 is a 1,500 lumen max-output flashlight with a tight-focused beam capable of pushing visible light over half a mile. Billed as a hunting light, mostly because of the

included red and green filters, the HT18 is a lot of light in a very small package. The build quality is great, and the run time of the included rechargeable 21700 li-ion battery is more than 1.5 hours at full power, and over 60 hours at low power. The Cree XHP35 HI LED has a lifespan of 50,000 hours, and the body is IP68 rated waterproof and dustproof. (MSRP: \$130; fenixlighting.com)

The PD35 Tactical Edition is a 5.4-inch 1,000-lumen light designed for outdoor and tactical applications. In Outdoor mode, the tail switch operates as on/off and momentary, while the stainless steel side button cycles the light through six output modes, including a variable strobe. Tactical mode disables the side button and operates Turbo (full-power) strobe and low power via the tail switch. I like pocket lights with side-mounted controls because I tend to position the button under one of my fingers, and can cycle through needed output just by squeezing my hand. The light runs on either two CR123A or a rechargeable 18650. The PD35 shown here is mounted on my house AR with the Fenix rail mount and AER-02 Remote Switch.

(MSRP: \$72; fenixlighting.com)

BY ALEX LANDEEN

LIFE

HAPPY, SAFE AND
WELL-LIT TRAILS
ABOUND WITH THIS
FINE NIGHTTIME
EXPEDITION GEAR



LIGHTFORCE STRIKER DRIVING AND STRIKER 850NM INFRARED LIGHT

➤ The Lightforce Striker LED driving lights are a perfect blend of form and function. A pair of Striker driving lights combines 30 high-performance LumiLED LEDs for an output of 11,250 raw lumens, and delivers 1 lux at 754 meters. Basically, that means you can read a newspaper on a moonless night half a mile away from the truck. The IP68 and IP69k protection rating means they can handle river crossings as well as high-pressure washing.

The pain-free wiring harness is one of the best features of these lights, giving you plug-and-play installation, with labeled wires and a dash switch included.

Lightforce is now offering all the quality and durability of the Striker Series lights in a 850nm Infrared Light option. These lights have all the same features and installation hardware, but operate in the 850nm range, making them compatible with all types and generations of night vision for when stealth is paramount. Whether for tactical operations, hunting, or just sneaking back home after staying out too late with the boys, the Striker Infrared lights will show you the way. **(Striker Driving LED pair MSRP: \$475; Striker Infrared LED pair MSRP: \$767; lightforce.com)**



BENCHMADE STEEP COUNTRY HUNTER

◀ I have always been a huge Benchmade fan. The company always seems to design knives that balance form and function with perfection, and its new Steep Country fixed blade is right on the mark. The weight, blade length (3.54 inches), the grippy santoprene handle and minimalist-styled sheath come together to be my new favorite utility/hunting fixed blade. The CPM-S30V satin drop-point looks ready for hard work, and the updated jimping location makes precision cutting more comfortable. The high visibility handle is described as “easy to keep track of when things start to get ‘Western.’” I had to look that up and learned on a dairy farming and calving blog it means “when things start to go a little sideways.”

Have you ever lost your trusty hunting knife at night in the rain on the side of a mountain four miles from camp? Yeah, high-vis orange is nice. So is a good flashlight.

(MSRP: \$130; benchmade.com)



5.11 TACTICAL VEHICLE READY HEXGRID SEAT

➤ If you are like me, you have a lot of gear in your truck. Some gear lives in the bed: tools, axe, shovel, straps, ropes, zip ties, etc. Inside the truck is the gear you generally need more often, or in a hurry. Having it all organized is key to getting at what you need when you need it. Whether you are commuting through the city or overlanding in the outback, organization is the key to success if things get Western—especially in the dark.

The new Vehicle Ready Hexgrid Seat system from 5.11 Tactical will help you keep all your gear in place and in reach. The panels can be mounted on either side of the seat and provide placement for hook and loop as well as Gear Set accessories, and the Hexgrid platform allows multi-angle attachment. The adjustable headrest strap, side seat straps and wedge strap are quickly removed in the event you need to remove or move the system around the truck. **(MSRP: \$45; 511tactical.com)**



ARROWHEAD TACTICAL CONCEALED CARRY APPAREL

✔ Anyone who has tried to carry IWB with sweatpants knows the struggle. Leisure/workout clothes are designed to be comfortable around the waist and allow a large range of motion, which is generally not compatible with safe concealed carry.

Arrowhead Tactical Apparel solved this problem by integrating a patent-pending carrier retention waistband into its sweatpants, joggers and shorts. The elastic internal retention belt adjusts to fit you and your holster. The elasticity is just enough to allow comfortable movement without compromising the retention.

The Carrier Joggers pictured here are comfortable cotton/poly blend on the outside, and duty on the inside. With durable knee paneling, zippered rear pockets, hip tool/knife pockets and roomy front pockets, these joggers allow you to engage a threat, or your camp chair and a bag of potato chips.

(MSRP: \$99.99; arrowheadtacticalapparel.com)



HULTS BRUK AGDOR 28 AXE

✔ You found your way to camp in the dark with the help of a pair of Lightforce Striker driving lights. Setup is made easier with your handy PD35 flashlight. You slice some elk jerky with your Steep Country fixed blade, and get to work setting up in the comfort of your Carrier Jogger pants. Now what? Fire time, that's what. Just one thing: You need an axe. Well I got you covered!

Swedish steel and American hickory come together in this versatile camp/expedition axe. Hand-forged in Sweden since 1697, Hults Bruk axes are made for a lifetime of use. The curved 28-inch hickory handle is paired with a 2.5-pound Montreal pattern head. Hults Bruk steel is struck multiple times during the grinding process increasing the density and durability of the axe, and the tempered zone is designed to hold a very sharp edge even after many sharpenings. For axe throwing enthusiasts, the Agdor 28 meets Big Axe specifications for WATL, IATF, and BATL. The axe comes with a leather sheath. **(MSRP: \$109; hultsbruk1697.se)**





MAN YOUR BATTLE WAGONS

IMAGE COURTESY
TIMO ALBERT

W

ELL FOLKS, last year was rather “sporty” and by the looks of it, 2021 could get even more interesting. That’s why our brethren over at *Skillset Magazine* are virtually building the ultimate SHTF overlanding vehicle. This road warrior has amazing features like a pepper-spray suppression system, all-terrain Matrax, compression sleeping quarters and even a B-17 turret outfitted with an M134 minigun. Talk about being ready to rock and roll. The upgrades on this beast are endless! Pick up *Skillset* Spring 2021 issue at outdoorgroupstore.com to find out more about this phenomenal project and join *Skillset’s* convoy of freedom. Grab your kit and mount up! —*Ballistic Staff*

1.00"

1.50"

2.20"



75.00 cm

29.53"

RELENTLESS

DELTAPOINT MICRO

RUGGED PERFORMANCE.
RELENTLESS SPEED.

