

VIP

Very Important Partner in .45 ACP

Almost every gun maker offers one or more models not only suitable, but downright dedicated for personal defense. In the case of STI, one of these models is the gun we will be testing – VIP. It is the smallest offered model with double stack frame. Everything on this gun is optimized for concealed carry – not only the size, but also used materials. As is usual with double stack STI models, polymer grip part is attached to a metal frame, but in this weapon, the frame is made from aluminium, which further alleviates the weight, but does not worsen the usual (i.e. high) comfort of shooting and handling. But we will talk about it later. The contrast of black frame and grip with white aluminium frame gives the gun very special look. As all STI pistols, this gun is based on the famous Colt 1911. Shortened barrel and slide, polymer grip part, aluminium frame and double stack magazine are just some differences between the old classic and this model. Let's find other...

First look

The gun in this review is fitted with tritium sights in two-dot configuration. When shooting, you just align the dots one above the other in the figure "8". This configuration will be more common, as some theories state that it is easier to align two dots vertically than three dots horizontally. Sights are solid, so windage is adjustable by drifting the rear sight in the cut. I did not need to make any adjustments to the sights, as the weapon was "dead on" right from the box. Many shooters are afraid how will they see the tritium sights during the day, when the light is much stronger. Here it is solved by white rings around the tritium capsules and during day the shooter sees white points. As the light recedes, the points are becoming green as the glow is more visible. The sights are snag-free and even though all the sides are sloped to not hang on clothes, no light is reflected into the eyes and they offer perfect aim in most light conditions. Front sight has bigger tritium capsule than the rear one, so in the perspective they look the same. That's another detail many companies forget and believe me – it can be very difficult to find little green point when there are two larger ones near you.

The slide is not rounded on top, as is usual, but it is made flat. Thanks to this, the sights look higher and it is easier to see the front sight in a hurry.

On the slide we can also find laser etched model of the gun and STI logo. The barrel (3,9" or 9,9cm) is bull, fitted directly to slide, without bushing. This fact also alleviates felt recoil.

Other differences can be found on the frame, the weapon is fitted with larger ambidextrous thumb safety and larger beavertail, which prevents painful hammer-bite.

The trigger is usually polymer, with titanium bow. The weight on the trigger is heavier than on tuned sporting guns, but that's because this gun is made for concealed carry.

The grip is checkered in front and in rear, on the sides is a double-diamond pattern. The grip is also shortened, which is good considering the grip is usually the part that is worst to conceal.

The magazine of the gun I tested will carry 10 rounds of .45ACP. Other available calibers are 9x19mm, .38Super and .40S&W. .45ACP is very popular in the USA, but even here it's the favourite caliber for many people – especially because of lower risk of overpenetration, even with FMJ ammo.

Weight of this gun is 710g, which is ideal compromise for whole day carry, when using such powerful caliber.

On the shooting range

Loading the magazine is easy, although the spring is quite strong. However, to rack the slide requires greater strength – as in all weapons in .45 ACP with short barrel, even here are stronger recoil springs, to prevent damage to the frame and slide. Barrel to slide and slide to frame fit is very near perfect, one of the best I've ever seen. Barrel lockup is precise and strong, when you press on the chamber from top, nothing moves. Slide and frame have no play between them; the “rattle” so well known from cheaper weapons is non-existent here. Thanks to this precise fit, the weapon is also extremely precise, so called “fighting precise”, required usually from duty or CCW weapon is many times overreached. However, the fit is not too tight, so the weapons functions flawlessly.

Thumb safety function is also without any problems. The “on” and “off” positions are clear and the movement between them is easy. Once in position, the safety is stable. The shooter can thus be calm, he always knows whether the gun will fire or not.

In the beginning I was a bit unsure about the “two-dot” system used on sights in this model. Combined with typically great grip angle (common for all 1911 clones), the sights proved to be useful – they provided positive and fast target acquiring.

I did not yet write anything about shooting the gun – that's because it is one of the best features of the gun. Let's face it – nice looks and many features are good on paper, but when drawn from the holster, the only thing that's important is if and how the gun shoots.

I have to say that the VIP handled during recoil much better than many full-size 1911 I've held, weapons of the same size and weight do not need to be mentioned – the VIP is way above them.

Used materials and most of all the perfect craftsmanship used when manufacturing this gun caused that shooting this gun is real treat, even for less experienced shooters. The gun returns to point of aim unbelievably fast and so follow-up shots are quick and easy – and of course very precise.

During the test I shot 150 rounds, and a quite a few more after the test ended, for the joy of shooting this gun. The gun performed flawlessly, as expected.

Carrying

This model is neither the smallest nor the lightest you can buy for CCW. It can however be carried easily, when correctly choosing holster, the gun is virtually invisible to others and the person carrying it feels no discomfort. Not even when carrying whole day.

Because of the size, plastic grip and frame width, this weapon will not fit in every holster for 1911. However, I did not have any problem finding suitable holsters from domestic and international manufacturers.

Conclusion

STI VIP is excellent weapon for CCW that will not leave its owner in trouble. As all officially imported STI weapons, even this has service secured at the distributor. The gun is behaving pleasantly and carrying is a breeze. What more to add – I can only recommend this gun for people who are carrying weapons for personal defense.

I'd like to thank Mr. Martinek, official distributor for Czech and Slovak republic, for lending weapon for this test.

Premek Marek