

STI's **Tactical** **and Duty One**

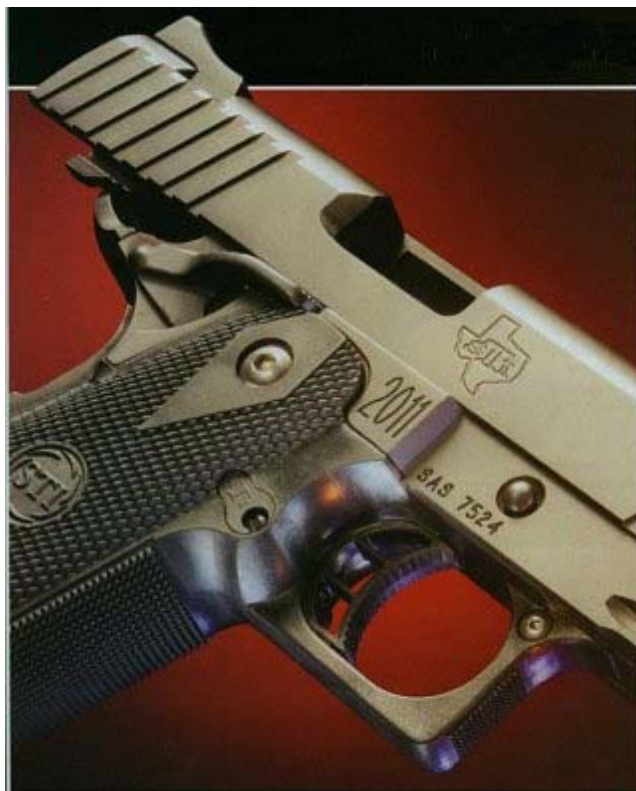
Autos

Competition's Demands Equals Tough Defensive Pistols!

Dave Anderson

Photos: Ichiro Nagata

qhe seemingly insatiable demand for 1911 autopistols is amazing. When I began reading gun maga zines around 1960, the GI .45 automatic was already half-a-century old and considered obsolescent by many experts. Future handgun designs would be double-action automatics on the pattern of the Walther P38 or Smith & Wesson 39. The old .45, like other old soldiers, would just fade away.



To some extent those prophets were right. Double-action autopistols in various configurations have indeed become very popular. But has the 1911 faded away? Not so you'd notice. As it approaches its century mark the 1911's popularity is nothing short of incredible.

In 1960 if you wanted a .45 auto you probably bought a military surplus 1911 or 19111. NRA members could buy military surplus .45s through the Director of Civilian Marksmanship (DCM) for about \$17. If you wanted a new commercial .45. Colt made three models, the Government Model, Gold Cup and the Commander.

Today there are more makes and models than I have space to list. The number of variations is staggering. Full size, mid-size, compact and subcompact, single action and double action, single-stack and high capacity double-stack, carbon, aluminum, polymer and stainless steel, fixed and adjustable sights, different style extractors. And still shooters want more.

I bought my first 1911, a Colt Gold Cup .45, in 1976. Coincidentally 1976 was the year in which both American Handgunner and the International Practical Shooting Confederation were founded. I was intrigued by the new sport of practical pistol shooting, and by the

articulate, thoughtful, and persuasive arguments in favor of the 1911 made by Jeff Cooper.

1911s Ruled

The 1911 design quickly came to dominate practical pistol competition and in turn,



competition influenced the evolution of the 1911. Demand for modifications to the basic design to make it more reliable, accurate and easy to shoot led to a surge of the custom 1911 pistol smith, along with companies supplying custom parts.

The modern 1911s available from several makers incorporate most of the features once considered custom, often at very reasonable cost. Yet, if you're thinking the top custom smiths are hurting, think again. Demand for the finest workmanship is increasing if any thing. One top pistoismith, Richard Heinie, recently advised he has stopped taking new orders. "By the time I get through the orders I have on hand now I'll be ready to retire," says Heinie.

Competition Roots

STI has earned a reputation as a highly respected maker in this competitive industry. The company has its roots in practical pistol competition. Back in 1990, top IPSC competitor and two-time world speedshooting champion Chip McCormick retired from competition to devote full time to his business (Chip McCormick Corp., or CMC), making and distributing a line of high-quality parts and accessories.



Some of these parts were designed and made by engineers Virgil and Fred Tripp. McCormick and the brothers formed a working relationship, with Tripp Research, Inc. (TRI) doing the development and production and CMC doing the promotion and marketing.

Competitors frantically searching for an edge had worked through the basic stuff (beavertails, extended safeties and mag releases, mag chutes, sights, triggers, checkering), on through various single and multiple-chamber compensators, through smaller-caliber, high-pressure loads. Two equipment developments remained to be explored; optical sights and high-capacity frames.

Early in 1991 McCormick pulled together a design team made up of Virgil and Fred Tripp, manufacturing engineer Sandy Strayer, and master pistoismith Steve Nastoff to design a high-cap, 1911-compatible frame. They took full advantage of another new technology; CAD, or computer-assisted design.



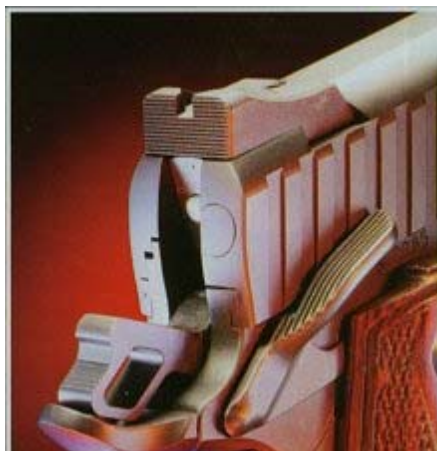
Amazingly, the team had a high capacity frame designed, built, debugged and in production in a year and were able to display the first models at the 1992 SHOT Show. In the fall of 1992, Jerry Barnhart used a gun built by Wilson on the modular frame to win the USPSA nationals. The modular design has been a dominant force in competition ever since.

The Ball Rolls

They weren't called STI at the time. Mostly we called them McCormick frames. They were marked "CMC" on the right side of the grip, "TRI" on the left. There have been changes in ownership of the design over the years. For a time the frames were marked TRI, then STI (for Strayer-Tripp International). In 1994 Sandy Stayer sold his share of STI to Strayer-Tripp and partnered with Mike Voigt, pistolsmith and world-class shooter, to form SV.

Subsequently STI was purchased by Dave Skinner, an IPSC competitor and firearms enthusiast. Skinner had recently sold an extremely successful business and was looking for new challenges. It was his business acumen which helped STI not only survive but prosper during the bleak decade in which new high-cap magazines could not be sold to the public.

STI double-stack subcompacts became popular for concealed carry, and a new line of single stacks on the classic 1911 pattern was introduced.



At IPSC matches today it's common incorporate what is becoming a must-have feature of defensive handguns; accessory frame rails allowing fast and easy attachment of accessories such as lights and laser-aiming devices. STI offers rail versions of both single and double-stack models. The samples on consignment were both in .45 ACP, though 9mm and .40 S&W calibers are available.

The high-capacity version is called the STI Tactical 5.0 (a more compact version called the 4.15 is also available). Other than the accessory rail this is our old friend, the familiar and well-proven STI design. It has all the features we expect from STI: polymer grip frame with checkered front-strap, mag well, long carbon-fiber trigger, beavertail grip safety, extended ambidextrous thumb safety.

Unlike competition versions it has STI fixed sights, front and rear sights mounted neatly in dovetail cuts in the slide. Slide finish is a



very practical, non-reflective flat black. The pistol is fitted with a bull barrel with integral feed ramp and the STI "RecoilMaster" guide rod.

STI pistols in my experience come with good triggers, and the Tactical was no exception. Weight of pull measured with a Lyman electronic gauge averaged 4 1/4 pounds with a clean break and slight overtravel. An adjustment screw permits the shooter to set overtravel, though I would caution against overdoing it. I'd rather have a bit of overtravel than a trigger which won't release due to a speck of dirt in the wrong place.

After disassembling, cleaning, and lubing the Tactical, I shot it with a variety of factory loads from Black Hills, Federal, Speer and Winchester, varying from 200-grain lead semi-wadcutters to +P 230 grain hollowpoints. Over sandbags at 25 yards groups averaged 2 1/2", with no group exceeding 3". I was pleased to find the fixed sights centered for windage, though of course elevation varied slightly with the recoil of different loads.

There were two failures to feed from the first magazine, and another two from the second magazine, both while using SWC ammunition. In all cases the bullet nose was stubbed into the feed ramp. Thinking the pistol might have a touch of new-gun tightness I got out a box of Black Hills 230-grain jacketed ball and quickly burned all 50 rounds through the gun. This proved to be the fix, as there were no subsequent malfunctions. It's not uncommon for a new autopistol to need some shooting to smooth up its operation, though a bit unusual for an STI.

STI calls its single-stack model with accessory rail the "Duty One." It's built on the STI carbon steel frame. Checkering on the frontstrap is 30 LPI and is beautifully done. The diamond-pattern grip panels are made of rosewood, carrying the STI logo.



More Goodies

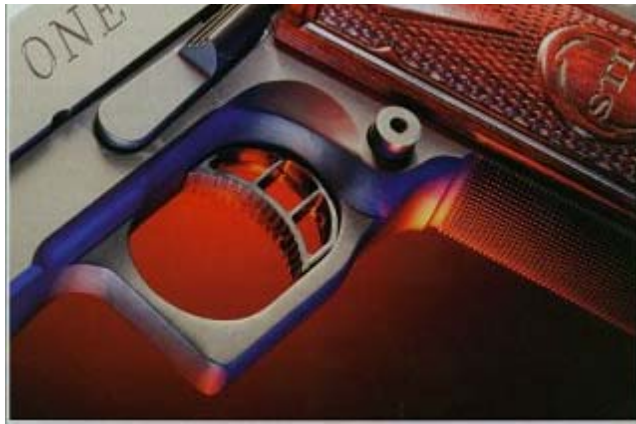
Other features are as on the Tactical model: the same fixed sights, match grade bull barrel, RecoilMaster guide rod system, ambi-safety, beavertail grip safety, squared triggerguard, long carbon-fiber trigger, flat black finish. All in all a most attractive pistol.

Out of the box, much to my surprise the Duty One did not function reliably. Rounds would stub into the feedramp, stubbornly refusing to feed into the chamber. With hollowpoints and SWC loads there were three or four failures to feed per magazine. Even with ball ammunition there was at least one failure to feed per magazine.

This, of course, is unacceptable so I boxed up the gun and returned it to STI. When it came back a few days later it appeared the integral feedramp of the bull barrel had been slightly reshaped and polished. Back at the range I had one failure to feed in firing 50 rounds of ball, and one more after switching to hollowpoints. Subsequently the gun has run fine for over hundreds of rounds.



How the gun got out in the first place I don't know (must have been one of those carefully prepared gunwriter specials we hear so much about?), but the lesson is if the gun doesn't work don't suffer in silence. A reputable company such as STI doesn't want an unreliable gun out there and will go to great lengths to make sure it is fixed. On that note, STI has never shirked ANY responsibility when it comes to making things right. They consistently listen to customer ideas to



improve their pistols, and are quick to make any changes needed. We wish some of the "big" boys would learn that same lesson!

Once it was running properly the Duty One proved to be a bit more accurate than the Tactical, averaging 2" groups at 25 yards over sandbags. Its trigger pull was a bit lighter, a couple of ounces under four pounds.

I had two accessory lights on hand, a Surefire X200 and an Insight M6X from Insight Technology Inc. The M6X incorporates as both a white light and a laser-aiming device. Both lights fit properly on the rails of both pistols, locking securely in place with no looseness or wobble, and correctly aligning the light beam

with the sights. The laser-aiming device on the M6X needed only minor tweaking of its adjustment screws to align with point of impact.

The option of adding weapons-mounted lights and lasers is a worthwhile feature on a defensive firearm. Accessory rails will continue to increase in popularity on home defense and duty sidearms. Once again the 1911 is on the cutting edge of technology and STI is there at the front lines.
