



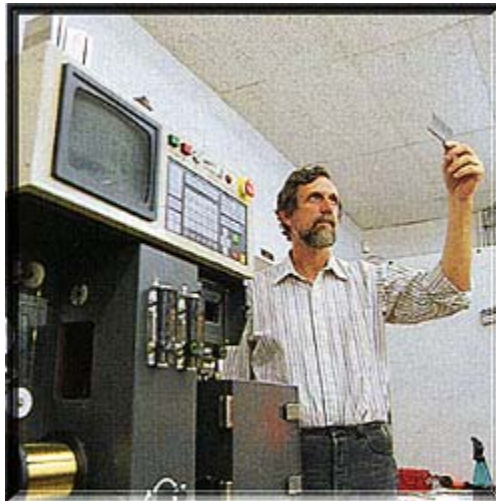
American Handgunner - July/August 1995

A Visit To STI

by Cameron Hopkins
Photos by Ichiro Nagata

American Handgunner broke the news about a radical new hybrid handgun, a competition-designed 1911 combining a plastic grip frame with a steel rail assembly (March/April '93). Initially sold as a frame only, the design incorporated a high capacity magazine in a grip size no larger than a standard 1911.

At the time (1993) there were three individuals involved with the development of the gun, which was officially called the Modular Competition System. Colloquially, it was simply called "the McCormick" after, former Steel Challenge champion Chip McCormick who had an exclusive contract to market the gun. The other two individuals were Virgil Tripp and Sandy Strayer. Virgil was the President of Tripp Research, the company that made the Modular Competition System. Sandy was an engineer who did a lot of the computer design and prototype work on the gun.



Since our initial article, they have parted company. There have been law suits filed. Litigation is currently pending between two of the parties. In the interest of keeping myself out of the way of whirling lawyer swords, I'll just leave it at that.

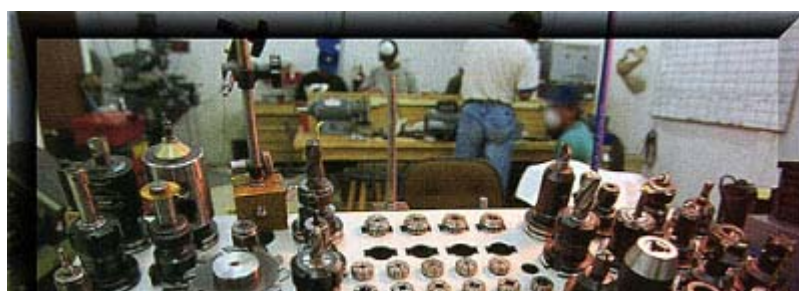
STI today has expanded from making only the Modular Frame to manufacturing and assembling a complete gun. The frames are what we have known them all along; the slides are made by Caspian Arms for STI. Other parts, such as the beavertail and thumb safety, are made by outside vendors as well.

I recently visited the STI facility in Austin, Texas, a totally state-of-the-art facility. There are three Fadal three-axis CNC machines, a wire EDM machine for making



precision sears and hammers and other less exotic machinery such as vertical mills, surface grinders and lathes.

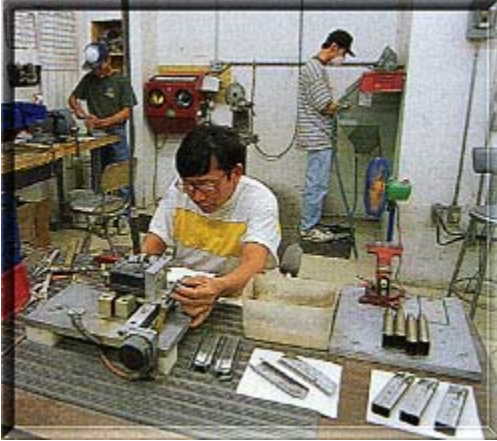
STI has an Auto-CAD system for computer-enhanced design of the geometry of components. "We use 'solids' in our CAD system which defines three dimensional data relationships of the parts. We then CAM, the process by which you create tool paths for the CNC machine



to cut the object that you described in the CAD," Virgil explained.

The manufacturing philosophy of STI is largely derived from the "continuous improvement" and "world class manufacturing" techniques implemented by Fred Tripp, Virgil's older brother. Fred is vice president of operations of a Swiss-owned biomedical manufacturing firm in Austin.

The manufacturing know-how that Fred brings to STI is translated into practical gunmaking by master pistolsmith Dave Dawson, who heads STI's assembly department. Sales and marketing duties are handled by savvy industry veteran Kyle Claitor.



I came away from Austin impressed that STI is poised to take the concept of high quality, precision engineered firearms up to the next level. Production is still modest in terms of sheer numbers of guns, but innovation is constantly improving the breed.

STI - Designed to Perform

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