

American Handgunner - Tactical 2004 Annual

Dave Spaulding

Gadzooks!

— A 9mm 1911!



The STI Tactical was designed from the ground up to be a fighting pistol.



The polymer trigger is fully adjustable and offers a solid mounting surface for the trigger fingers.

Many readers will claim it's heresy to write about a 1911 pistol in anything other than 45 ACP. Old Man Browning intended his pistol to be chambered in 45, not in a puny sub caliber like 9mm. While I can understand those feelings, I just can't agree. There are those of us out there who just like (shudder the thought) the 9mm. And guess what? Believe it or not, the cartridge really does stop people in real, honest to goodness gunfights. While I agree a bigger bullet is a more effective bullet, I have just seen too many people who have succumbed to the power of a good 9mm loading. When I say seen, I don't mean some statistical analytical baloney like the Relative Incapacitation Index, and ditto for the Fuller Index. I mean seen people shot in the street, or posted at the coroner's office. You know, seen like with my own eyes. I kinda' like trusting my own senses on such subjects.

At this point I have some of you nodding your heads up and down while some will not read another word and will throw this magazine across the room. So be it. The truth is the 9mm can be an effective fight-stopping round, but I am the first to admit proper bullet design does play a critical role. If you want a bullet that works very well without all of the fuss over load selection, then by all means, pick a .45 ACP, as it is the most proven handgun caliber, regardless of which stopping power test you may wish to review. I like Clint Smith's view on all of this test media and such. Clint states he has never had a block of ballistic gelatin attack him and neither have I. And, I have never seen the inside of a human chest cavity that looked like a block of gelatin.

If you take a few moments to think about the whole issue of bullet performance, one cannot help but notice our opinion does not really mean much in the whole equation. It's not our opinion that counts; it's our opponent's viewpoint that's importance. If he or she does not understand that the "Wonder Bullet Index" states your carry load is rated for a 90% stop ratio, they might not just respond as they are supposed to. This means you might just have to change their mind on the issue by giving them a few additional "reminders", provided, of course, you did not miss in the first place it does tend to affect stopping power.

Fast, follow-up shots are where the 9mm really shines. It's easy to control, and light recoil operation is why many of us choose to shoot the 9mm. I feel the real way to stop an active aggressor is through accuracy, which can only be achieved through practice. As I advance in age and become more susceptible to such things as carpal-tunnel, ulnar nerve compression and a whole host of related maladies, I find I can get in a whole lot of repetitive practice with the 9mm, without suffering numbness or pain at the end of a practice session. Thus, I shoot a nine, but, I still keep a Robar 1911 .45 close at hand --just in case.



STI Tactical



The front strap checkering on the STI Tactical 9mm aided the grip without being abrasive.

From their humble beginning in the 1980s as a supplier of high-end 1911 components, STI now offers exceptional 1911 pistols to meet the needs of a wide range of users. While breezing through a recent edition of American Handgunner, I noticed an advertisement from STI displaying their new Tactical Series of 1911 pistols. While the gun is manufactured in all the popular calibers, I opted to test the nine for reasons that should now be obvious. The 9mm Tactical weighs in at just a tad over 28 ounces with an empty magazine. With a 4" barrel the slide is 6.65" long and .92" wide. Add a height of 5.78" (from the top of the rear sight to the bottom of the magazine funnel), and the Tactical is quite similar to the Colt Commander in size.

To help reduce weight and grip diameter, the trigger guard and double stack grip are made from polymer while the dust cover and frame rail area is made from steel. Since separate grip panels are not necessary, the double stack grip maintains a reasonably thin 1.27" width. Due to the single action trigger, the trigger reach, from the grip safety to the trigger face, is 2.59". I have very small hands for a man and I have absolutely no problem working the trigger or other controls on the STI Tactical 9. I think many people of small stature will find the STI Tactical to be very much to their liking for this same reason.

The first thing you'll notice about the Tactical is the large magazine funnel on the bottom of the grip frame. While many will question the addition of such a device on a carry gun, I would respond to this with "How do you plan to carry it?" The gun is named "The Tactical" and from the pistol's no-nonsense appearance and features, I get the distinct impression the gun is directed at the SWAT or Special Operations community. If the gun is going to be carried in a thigh holster and operated with gloved hands, the magazine funnel will prove to be a worthwhile addition. As one who has worked very hard to master the combat speed load, I found the magazine funnel to be a real advantage.

Conducting shot-to-shot drills with a PACT Club Timer II, I found I was able to get shot-to-shot speed loads in the 1.1 to 1.3 second area without fail. For someone who has a shot-to-shot reload time that normally hovers in the 1.7 area, I thought the magazine funnel was a great feature. Since the



The Streamlight M6 light combines a 90 lumen white light with a high visibility laser in a compact package.

thoughtful. The adjustable trigger is also made from polymer, with light serrations in the trigger face. I found this trigger to be nicely curved and quite comfortable. The trigger broke right at four pounds with a sharp reset that appeared to be about 1/8" in length. This gun should be a fast shooter!

In keeping with other tactical-grade pistols currently available, the STI pistol has light mount rails integrated into the dust cover. The rails are designed to fit the excellent M3 and M6 lights available from Streamlight. The M3/M6 lights are superior to many other light systems in they easily slide on and off the front of the pistol instead of the inconvenient "rocking off" required by other lights. The M6 was used during the evaluation of the STI Tactical since it incorporates both a white light and red dot laser in the same unit. Powered by two lithium batteries, the M6 offers 90-plus lumens of white light power with both a quick on/off and a constant power switch. The laser can be used in concert with the white light or by itself, depending on the needs of the user. The M6 is a robust unit that will work well for the home owner and SWAT officer alike.

The standard sights on the Tactical are the Heinie Slant-Pro sights, which have become some of my favorite combat pistol sights. If I could afford it, Heinie sights would be a fixture on all my auto pistols. The slant-back configuration of the Heinie sight is smooth enough to resist snagging, but still have enough of an edge so the sight can be used to cycle the slide, if necessary. The serrated large face of the rear sight reduces glare and assists the eye in focusing on the front sight. I currently suffer from O.A.E. Syndrome, so a proper sight configuration is important to me. What? You don't know what O.A.E. is? It means Old Ass Eyes and when you get it you will appreciate a set or properly designed sights, like those from Dick Heinie.

magazine funnel can be easily removed by pulling out the mainspring housing pin, I can easily see how the Tactical could be used in concealed carry applications by pulling off the funnel and putting in a shorter pin. It should be noted the STI Tactical has a great deal of polymer material on the bottom of the grip frame. A little patient time with a Dremel tool could create a nice magazine funnel that could easily nullify the need for the add-on funnel. Just a thought.

Other Features

Like all STI pistols, only the best features and accessories were incorporated into the Tactical. The ambidextrous thumb safety lever is wide enough to get a good purchase on the serrated surface without being so large it would snag on clothing. The hammer spur is a rectangular "commander style" with an upturned angle to give an enhanced gripping surface to the cocking thumb. The magazine release button is slightly raised, but non-checked, so the shooting hand thumb can engage it without breaking the shooting grip and not abrading any clothing -



The skeletonized hammer is cut in an upward configuration to aid in thumb-cocking.

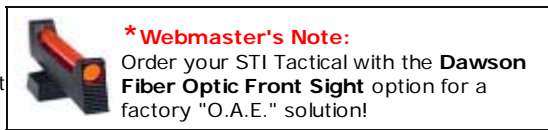


A quality knife and a multi-tool supplement the utility of the light mounted STI Tactical 9mm pistol. The knife is from SOG, The multi-tool is a Leatherman.



There is one thing about Dick's sights I would change, however, and that is the black front sight. Front serrations really don't help as my O.A.E.s just don't see black-on-black sights anymore. A tritium dot helps, but not near as much as a large orange sight insert* like those that Smith & Wesson is now putting on some of their revolvers. Since the front Heine sight that came on my test STI Tactical was nice and wide, I found that putting a piece of orange tape on the sight fixed the problem. Ahhh, there is a cure for O.A.E. Syndrome. Are you listening here, Dick?

The Wilson Wilson Combat holster fits the STI Tactical quite well. The suede covered paddle holds the gun in tight while the holster adjustment screws give a fast draw.



Home on the Range

As good as the STI Tactical looked, it's always nice to know how well something shoots. Unlike my friend and Editor, Roy Huntington, I don't live in warm and sunny San Diego. No, I live in cold and snowy Ohio. So, I braved the snow and cold and conducted a rather long 500 round test. I say "rather long" as I kept going in to warm up, but I left the Tactical outside in the cold. As a matter of fact, I once left it in the snow to see if I could freeze it up. It didn't. Oh yeah, remember that magazine funnel? It came in real handy trying to load the gun with Thinsulate gloves on.

All through the day the STI Tactical kept digesting everything I could put through it. I tend to favor the Winchester 127-grain +P+ SXT hollow point in my 9mm pistols. This load bridges the gap between weight, expansion and velocity and has displayed a solid history in the street. With expanded diameters of .63" to .71" from human torsos at autopsy, I feel the Winchester 127 SXT has all the right stuff needed in a combat load. Fortunately, the STI Tactical really liked the 127, as I was able to keep five round groups on a 3" Birchwood Casey Shoot-N-C target, handheld, at fifty feet as long as I concentrated and did my part. Not every time, mind you, but often enough to make it a trend.

In an effort to test how fast I could shoot and reset the trigger on the STI Tactical, I shot a series of rounds on a Porta-Target Bianchi plate rack equipped with six 8" plates from eight yards. My best run was 2.19 seconds while my worst was 2.87. I actually shot a few slower times, but these were when I missed a shot and had to play catch-up. Shooting plate racks require a great deal of concentration and there were times, due to the weather, my attention waned. Yeah, I know, hard to believe.

I used a Wilson Adjuster Paddle holster for the Tactical with a great deal of satisfaction. While I normally don't recommend an adjustable holster, this Bill Rogers designed rig is one of the few that really works and works well. The suede-covered paddle really holds the gun tightly in place and the adjustable holster body gives just the right amount of drag desired by the user. If a paddle holster is not to your liking, Wilson offers a screw-on belt loop adjustable to any degree or cant desired. I prefer the belt loop, and use this rig on a regular basis. Due to its high level of adjustability, the Wilson Adjuster is a nice rig to have so you can carry different guns in the same place and at the same elevation.



The magazine well will be controversial on a combat pistol, but will come in quite handy if a speed load is needed.

Would I change anything? I would put forward cocking serrations on the slide, but other than that I was very happy with the STI Tactical 9mm. This gun is an ultra-reliable 9mm in a caliber that can be shot fast and accurately. Yeah, I know, it might be heresy to shoot and own a 1911 in a caliber other than .45 -- so call me a heretic.