

## The Blue Press May 07 - STI Spartan

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By Duane Thomas

STI's aptly named Spartan 1911 is intended to give shooters a custom quality gun at a price the average shooter is actually willing and able to spend. Thus, the Spartan is priced at \$660 MSRP. A major factor allowing STI to offer this gun at that price is that there are no options available. None. You can have a Spartan one way: one finish, one set of sights, in one caliber, etc. This is in contrast to STI's other 1911 lines — like the Trojan in which, when ordering, you can spec out exactly the gun you want. The Spartan is chambered for .45 ACP; it's available as a full-sized, five-inch barreled, carbon steel, single stack, Government Model 1911. Period.

Esthetically, the STI Spartan is a drab gun. Its finish is Parkerized, the grips feature seriously pedestrian grain, the front sight has an orange fiber optic insert, and the rear is the Italian LPA adjustable.

The heart of the Spartan .45 (what you're really buying) is the slide-to-frame to barrel fit, and in this area the Spartan delivers. There's no movement in any of these areas with the gun in battery, either laterally or vertically. STI's goal with the Spartan was to provide a custom level of slide/frame/barrel fit at a non-custom price. I have never before seen a fit like this on anything but an expensive custom gun, much less a piece in the Spartan's price range.

The slide, frame and barrel are made by Armscor in the Philippines. All the other parts except the (PA sight) are made by STI, which ships them overseas; the guns are built by Armscor, then sent back to STI. At that point, the Spartans are given to STI's quality control people (led by Chris Schirmer) who go over them with a fine-tooth comb. If a problem is found, typically it's easier for STI to fix it in house; Spartans very rarely go back to the Philippines once they're here.

The Spartan's slide is made from extruded bar stock; the frame is cast. That last fact does not turn me off the way it may some traditionalists. What would tell the tale was how the Spartan kept that great fit once I put some rounds through it. In my experience, if a 1911 is going to shoot loose, it does so in short order. Even many guns that seem nicely fitted out-of-the-box become rattletraps once you put a hundred rounds through them. On the other hand, if a gun's still perfectly tight after a hundred rounds, it's going to be tight for one hell of a long time.

STI's spec for Spartan trigger pull weight is 4.5 to five pounds. My sample Spartan's trigger broke at an even five pounds, according to my NRA weight set.

There were only a few areas on this gun that might he counted as flaws:

(1) Even given the beavertail grip safety's built-up "speed bump," I still found it quite possible to hold the Spartan so the grip safety wouldn't disengage. Fortunately, any decently skilled pistolsmith knows how to sensitize a grip safety. Actually, it's so simple that even many non-pistolsmith-trained end users know how to do the job themselves.

(2) The mag well entrance features those two nice sharp fangs in front so traditional on beveled mag wells — famed in song and story for pinching palm flesh painfully between magazine and mag well during a speed reload, and raising a blood blister. The gun needs to either be fitted with a mag funnel or have those flesh manglers radiused into oblivion.

(3) The magazines suck. Eight-rounders made in Italy by ACT-Mag and now sold in the US under various companies' marques, this design has developed a very bad reputation among serious shooters for its feed lips cracking after only a bit of use, and they have very fragile baseplates. I can attest to that last from my own experience of dropping an empty ACT Mag on an indoor range's concrete floor; when the mag hit the floor its baseplate shattered to pieces. The folks at STI were very straightforward with me about the cheap magazine being one of the ways they make the price point on the gun. If they went to a better magazine, they'd have to raise the price. Since most 1911 fans, including myself, already own a goodly supply of top quality mags, frankly I'd rather have the great price I've already got the great mags.

(4) With the gun assembled, the front of the full-length recoil spring guide rod protrudes so far forward it's necessary to strip the slide from the frame so the guide rod can move backward enough to allow the bushing to turn. This is not a function of the length of the guide rod, but the way the lower barrel lugs, against which the guide rod butts, are cut. This is no big deal, though it does affect field-stripping procedures somewhat.

(5) The polymer mainspring housing is considerably longer than it should be, protruding well below the level of the frame. It looks had. Fortunately, replacement steel 1911 mainspring housings practically litter the streets.

The STI Spartan was accuracy and reliability test ed with nine .45 ACP loads. Hardball on hand was Federal's generic American Eagle. Hollowpoints included Black Hills "red box" 230-grain JHP (Black Hills' ammo is in red boxes, their reloads in blue); from Federal came the t 65-grain Hydra-Shok and "Classic" 230 grain JHP (basically the Hydra-Shok without the post); Hornady's 230-grain XTP; Remington's 185-grain Golden Saber; and from Winchester the 185-grain Silvertip, 230-grain SXT and Winchester-USA "white box" 230-grain JHP.

Accuracy testing consisted of five-shot groups from the bench at 50 feet, the maximum distance possible at the indoor range on which I was shooting. Both American Eagle ball and the Hornady 200 grain XTP posted 0.8-inch groups. Both Federal's 165 grain Hydra-Shok and 230-grain "Classic" JHP came in at one inch even. But slightly larger was the 1.1 inch group with Winchester-USA 230 grain JHP. The Remington Golden Saber threw a five-shot 1.4 inch group, with four of those bullets going into a super-tight one hole 0.65 inch. All the rest of the ammunition was in the 1.4 to 1.6 inch range. to a gun of any price we would have to term this accuracy "impressive" Considering the STI Spartan's price tag, t think we can safely upgrade that to "spectacular."

Reliability with all loads was perfect. Testing the Spartan's slide-to-frame to barrel fit afterward revealed absolutely no change from its brand-new state; it still locked up like a little bank vault. As I said earlier, this is not the prettiest gun in the world. But beauty is as beauty does, and by the time I was through testing the STI Spartan .45, given its level of accuracy and reliability, it was looking pretty damn good to me.

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