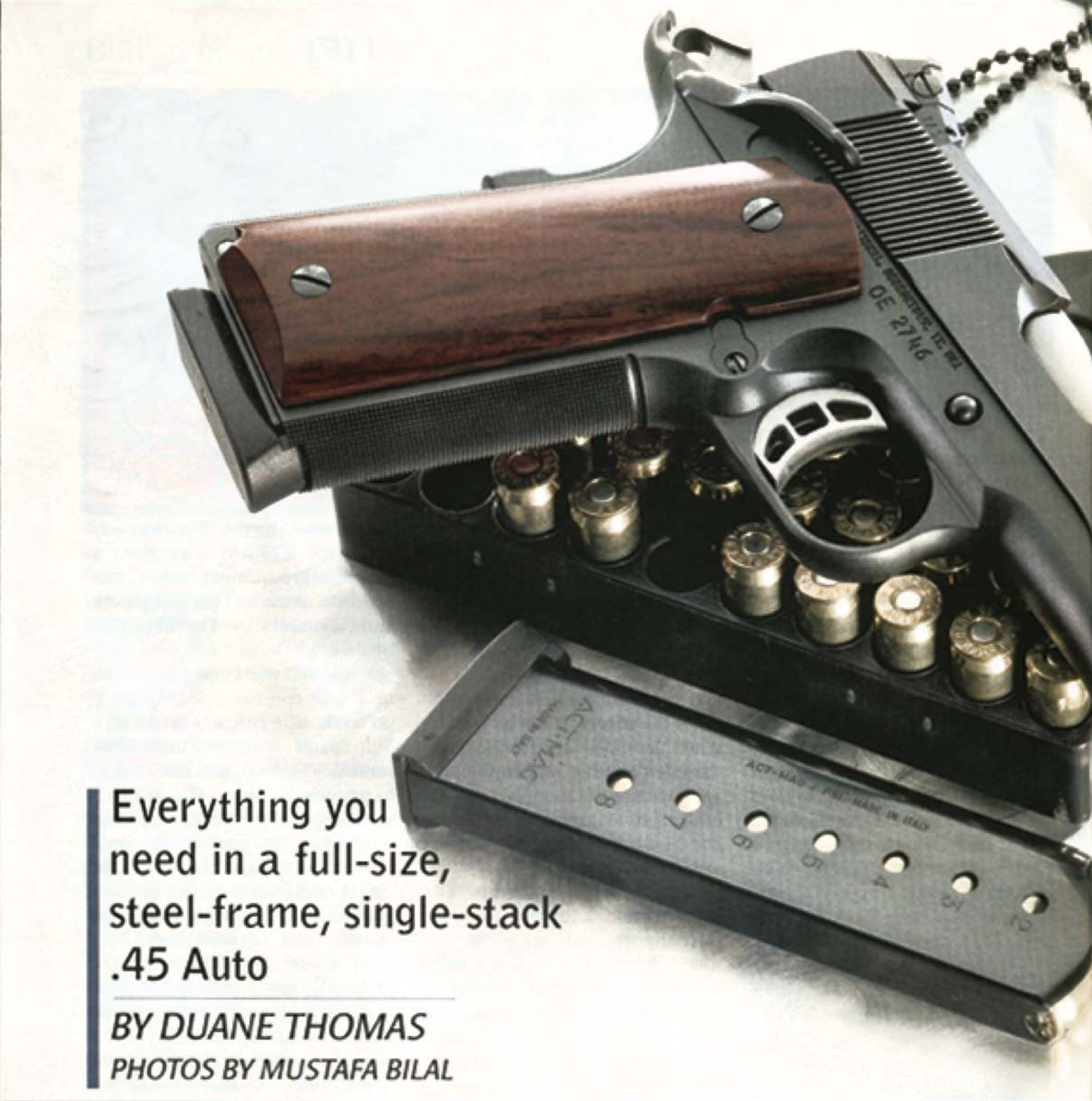

Everything you need in a full-size, steel-frame, single-stack .45 Auto

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PHOTOS BY MUSTAFA BILAL

The STI Legacy

STI produces nothing but 1911 auto pistols and parts for same. The Texas-based company made its mark by offering a modular steel-and-polymer frame that allows a 1911 to incorporate a high-capacity magazine and still retain a reasonably light all-up weight, then segued into producing entire guns built on such frames. Today STI has expanded its product line to include all manner of 1911s: polymer frames, steel frames, full-size, midsize, compact, double stack, single stack, race guns, concealment pieces, etc. This article reviews a gun,

STI's Legacy is intended to be an elemental 1911 in the Government Model-size, steel-framed, single-stack .45 configuration, giving the self-defense-oriented shooter everything such a gun should have and nothing it shouldn't.

the STI Legacy, that is very different from what the company made its name with.

The STI Legacy is a beautiful full-size, steel-frame, single-stack 1911 .45 auto. Finish is blued (as many would agree God intended for a Government Model 1911), polished on the slide flats with lightly frosted bead blasting everywhere else. The only non-black external parts on the Legacy are the aluminum trigger and stainless steel barrel, bushing, hammer and mainspring housing pin.

The grips are smooth, stunningly colored and figured cocobolo. I generally prefer sharply checkered grips for more bite into the hand, but I agree that it would be a crime against nature to checker over that grain. In all, this is an eye-catching but tastefully understated presentation.

There are not a lot of markings on this gun. On the left slide flat we find the word "Legacy" in cursive script, flanked on each side by minor scrollwork; on the right slide flat there is the STI logo. On the frame is the factory name and the serial number, and that's it.

There's a master line border along the length of the slide where flat meets round. This is a purely aesthetic touch that doesn't make the gun shoot any better, it just looks great. The slide has been flattopped and the flat marked with what STI calls the Diamond LPI treatment. This consists of two sets of longitudinal lines, 30 lines per inch, one in front of and one behind the ejection port, between the front and rear sights, each contained inside a lozenge that's pointed at front and rear. It's quite striking.

Slide-cocking grooves on the Legacy are located only at the rear. In keeping with its "elemental 1911" vibe, there are no forward cocking grooves as we see on so many 1911s these days. Personally, I like the forward grooves; I'm habituated to coming up from underneath the gun, pinching the forward grooves between thumb and fingers, then pushing to the rear to do a chamber check. However, I know that many people despise the appearance of the forward grooves and think a "real" 1911 .45 should have only the traditional rear grooves.

Slide-to-frame fit on the Legacy is, as we would expect, perfect. There is no movement of the slide on the frame side to side or up and down, no vertical or horizontal float of the rear of the barrel when we push on the hood with the action closed, no movement of the front of the barrel in the bushing likewise with the action closed. Yet when the action is hand cycled it moves with oily smoothness.


The slide has been flat-topped and features STI's Diamond LPI treatment.

The barrel throat on the Legacy is fully ramped, as opposed to the traditional two-piece ramp and throat, simply because STI does ramped barrels in its medium-bore 1911s, which when hot-rodded by handloaders do need the extra support. Though the .45 ACP does not actually need the ramped barrel, it's just easier for STI to do all of its frame cuts for the same sort of barrel.

Sights are plain black, the front a serrated ramp .110 inch wide and dovetailed into place, the rear STI's TAS (Tactical Adjustable Sight). The TAS looks like what you'd get if you tossed a Novak Extreme Duty and Wilson Combat Pyramid into a blender together. The side profile of the sight body is triangular and non-snag; from the rear we see that the top corners of the sight have been cut away, giving the blade a half-octagon shape.

Theoretically, having the top corners of the rear-sight blade cut away allows the shooter to see more of the downrange area during a defensive emergency or match shooting problem. I do like the fact that, on the TAS, the top flat portion of the sight, the "line" we use to level the front- and rear-sight blades, is quite a bit wider than on some other designs using this theory.

The rear notch is .113 inch wide. The resultant sight picture is a bit cramped for my tastes, with narrow light bars on either side of the front blade when it's centered in the rear notch. If this were my gun, I'd take a file to the front sight to narrow it down, giving me decent light bars for fast sight pickup when firing at speed.

All the "combat" features we expect to see on a well-set-up carry 1911 are present and accounted for: The safety levers are extended and ambidextrous, the hammer rowelled and skeletonized, the grip safety a beavertail with a lugged speed bump at the bottom.

In respect of that last part, I did find it quite easy to grip the gun in such a fashion that the grip safety would not disengage, resulting in failures to fire. However, this is the case on almost every 1911 that passes through my hands, factory-stock or custom, so we cannot especially criticize the Legacy in this regard. If this were my gun, a bit of grip-safety sensitization would be in order.

The frontstrap and flat mainspring housing are both checkered 30 lines per inch. The magazine-release button is not the semi-extended "tactical" part we see on so many current 1911s but rather a traditional short button that's been drilled and tapped should the shooter want to add an extended, oversize button head.

I noticed that when reassembling the gun, the head of the one-piece full-length recoil-spring guide rod protrudes far enough forward that it will not allow the barrel bushing to turn. You can get around that by slipping the frame on the slide and simply not installing the slide stop until after the barrel bushing has been turned to capture the recoil assembly instead of before, as we're used to doing on a 1911. This is, in the overall scheme of things, no big deal, but it does change the reassembly procedures somewhat.

There's no magazine funnel, just a simple bevel. I like a mag funnel on a carry gun, but apparently I'm in the minority on that one. The mag-well bevel was retained to two sharp fangs at front that are guaranteed to pinch flesh during a speedload. As long as I was sensitizing the grip safety, I'd radius those flesh-manglers into oblivion, too.

STI does offer a bolt-on mag funnel for its single-stack guns. Examining the bottom of the Legacy's mainspring housing, we find it's already drilled and tapped for the requisite bolt. I really admire the design of the STI bolt-on funnel; there was a lot of good thought that went into it. The problem I have with other bolt-on funnels is that when the funnel is installed, there's nothing stopping it from rotating on the gun but friction. Thus a hard lateral blow to the funnel can turn it on the frame, pinning a mag in

The rear sight is STI's TAS (Tactical Adjustable Sight), described by the author as "what you'd get if you tossed a Novak Extreme Duty and Wilson Combat Pyramid into a blender together."

The frontstrap and flat mainspring housing are both checkered 30 lines per inch; the magazine-release button is the traditional short part.

the gun (if it happens with a mag in place) or preventing insertion of a magazine at all (if there's no mag in the gun to start). I have actually had this happen to me with a different maker's 1911 fitted with a bolt-on funnel. The STI bolt-on funnel, by contrast, is scalloped out in the center, with walls of metal to either side that, when the funnel is bolted on, absolutely stop it from turning on the gun. Nice. If this were my gun there's no doubt in my mind I'd install one of the STI bolt-on funnels, which would not only provide me with faster and smoother reloads but cover the front of the mag-well opening so I wouldn't have to radius metal there.

Recoil-spring weight is the traditional 16 pounds. Mainspring weight goes 15 pounds; traditional factory standard is 23. Running a lighter-than-factory-standard mainspring is one of the keys to getting really great trigger pulls in a 1911. The trigger itself is a skeletonized aluminum medium-length unit that splits the difference between the traditional long and short lengths.

Trigger pulls are really nice. There's very little in the way of take-up, but considerable smooth creep and a bit of overtravel. This is all to the good. I find the classic "breaks like a glass rod with no overtravel" trigger pulls favored by target shooters to be a handicap when shooting fast. Hitting the hard resistance point of the "link" to start, then having the overtravel stop whack into the mag-release button as soon as the shot breaks tends to really move the gun around in my hand. I much prefer a trigger that has smooth creep and overtravel built into it for shooting fast and straight. With a longer and smoother trigger pull than we're used to finding in the typical "glass rod" 1911, I can treat the gun more like a revolver—albeit a revolver with really short, light trigger pulls—and get a much more rolling and continuous approach to firing a string of shots. Heretical, I know, but it works for me.

The trigger broke at three pounds even. Who says you can't get a great trigger on an out-of-the-box 1911?

The STI Legacy was accuracy and reliability tested with a reasonably diverse assortment of seven .45 ACP loads. Hardball on hand was from Black Hills, its reloaded blue-box ammo (Black Hills' reloads come in blue boxes, its factory-new stuff in red). Hollowpoints included the

The mag well is beveled; the author would like to see the two sharp edges at the front of the mag well better radiused. STI produces a bolt-on mag funnel that's inletted to fit around the mag well, absolutely ensuring against the rotation from a hard lateral blow that can occur with other bolt-on designs.

The STI Legacy was a very consistent performer accuracy-wise, posting similar (and similarly nice) groups with every ammo type tested.

Federal 230-grain "Classic" JHP (basically, the Hydra-Shok without the post), Hornady XTPs in both 185- and 200-grain weights, the Speer 230-grain Gold Dot and from Winchester both the 185-grain Silvertip and 230-grain SXT.

Reliability-wise, the closest thing I had to a malfunction was one instance, early on in my testing, when, dropping the slide on a full eight-round magazine of Winchester Silvertips, the top round didn't completely chamber. Instead it stopped partway into the chamber in the classic "45-degree nose-up malf" position. A light tug on the slide saw the action close. When discussing this with those at STI, they opined that this was probably a stereotypical "breaking-in malfunction," that I should shoot the gun a bit more with ball and see if that didn't cure the problem all on its own. I went back to the range, fired another 100 rounds of Black Hills ball, then found that the Legacy would indeed chamber the top round off a full magazine of Winchester Silvertips every time. And I know that's true because I did it five times in a row to verify.

Accuracy was tested by firing five-shot groups from the bench at 50 feet, the maximum distance possible at the indoor range on which I was shooting. The Legacy was very consistent. Best accuracy came with the Speer Gold Dots, at 1.1 inches. A very popular group size for the Legacy was 1.3 inches; four of the seven loads tested (the Federal "Classic," both the Hornady XTPs and the Winchester Silvertip) posted groups of that size. Of note was one group with Hornady 200-grain XTPs that put four rounds into a super-tight .6 inch with, alas, a single flyer spoiling the otherwise one-hole group. Black Hills ball came in at 1.4 inches. "Worst" group (definitely a relative term for the STI Legacy) was an inch and a half with Winchester SXTs.

I had been afraid the smooth cocobolo grips on the Legacy, though they have undeniable eye appeal, would prove slippery enough to accentuate kick. Maybe on a gun with a smooth frontstrap and non-checkered mainspring housing that might be true, but I found the checkering front and rear gave more than enough bite, even during rapid fire, to allow this gun to be easily controlled.

How the gun shoots from the bench is only part of the equation. In firing the STI Legacy while standing on my own two hind legs like a man, I found that its combination of secure gripping surfaces and great trigger pulls made this a very easy gun to fire quickly and accurately. Lately, I've been experimenting with certain changes to my shooting technique that have guns in general behaving a lot better in my hands, and it was a kick to watch the Legacy's front sight track straight up and right back to the same spot, time after time, in rapid fire.

According to the folks at STI, their goal with the Legacy was to produce an elemental 1911, in the classic single-stack .45 ACP configuration, that gives the shooter everything he needs in a 1911 and nothing he doesn't. To that end, they have succeeded. Though I do have to say, there have been a few aesthetic choices made that exist simply to look good. But what the hell, they *do* look good.

Source

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