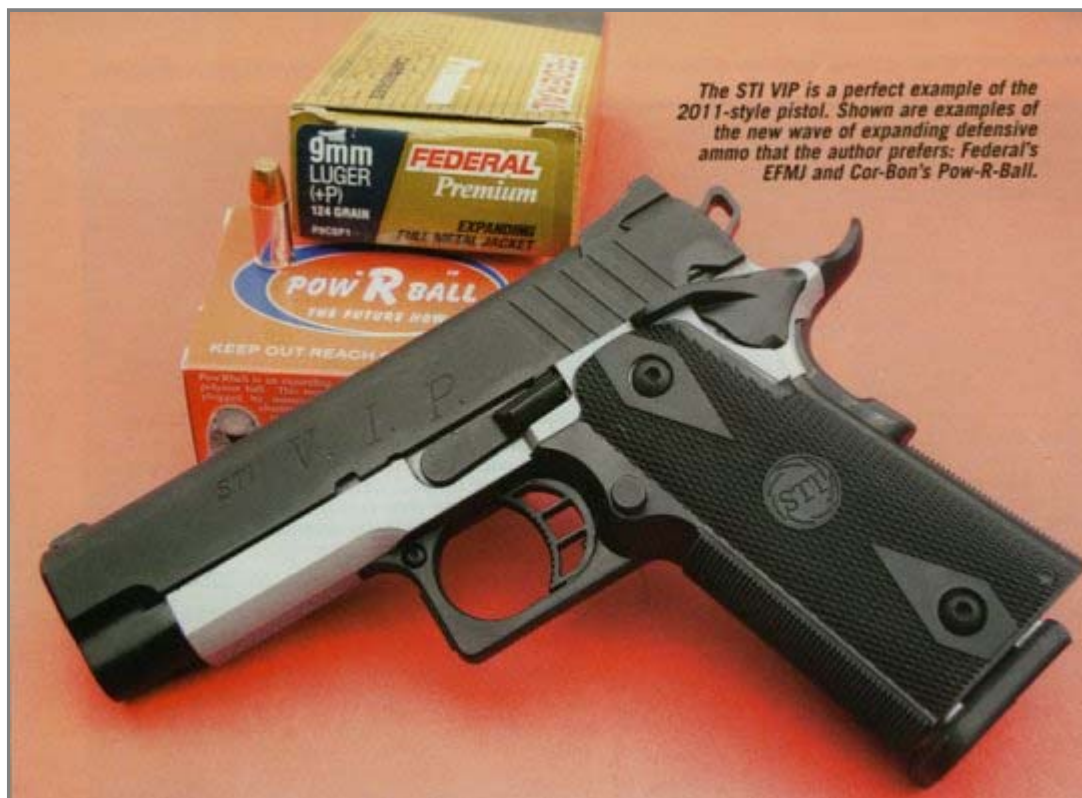


One Very Important Pistol

From STI International comes all you need in a quality self-defense auto right out of the box. And yes, it's a nine.

By Dave Spaulding



If you're reading this magazine, you probably agree that 1911-style pistols and their compact counterparts may very well be the finest defensive pistol design ever made. Certainly, this could be argued, but think for a minute of all that John Browning accomplished with his design. It is the only pistol design in which the trigger truly slides to the rear instead of pivoting from the top. This action design not only allows the trigger finger to stay solidly in one place throughout the entire trigger stroke, it also permits a short reset that helps keep the gun aligned with the intended target.

The more leverage (as well as length of travel) a shooter must place against the trigger face to fire it, the more likely the gun will move off target. A movement of just a quarter-inch of the muzzle on a pistol pointed at a target 10 yards away will result in a substantial loss of accuracy, perhaps completely missing the target.

While Mr. Browning did not want a grip safety on his .45 pistol, I can see why the military insisted on it. Still, the gun does operate completely in correspondence with the human hand. Open and close your hand a few times, and then note how the controls on a 1911-style pistol move. When the hand closes around the grip, the web depresses the grip safety without thought. The index finger aligns correctly with the location of the trigger, and the thumb will fold down onto the thumb safety. As the hand releases the pistol's grip, all of these controls will be released and the thumb safety reengaged.

You can't tell me that John Browning did this by accident. So advanced was his design that now as we enter the 21st century, the 1911 pistol is the focus of a renaissance. In the last several years a number of "new 1911 pistols have been introduced to the market. Top manufacturers like Smith & Wesson and SIGARMS, long closely associated with double-action pistols, have seen the trend and have introduced 1911-style pistols. This is for good reason, as the 1911 is now the favored pistol of not only the competition crowd but a large number of tactical/SWAT units. It is also being adopted as the general sidearm of many law enforcement agencies and individual cops. More and more legally armed citizens are hearing the siren song of the 1911 as they come to realize just how easy it is to shoot.

As the desire to capture the traditional 1911 market builds, there are a few companies that are trying to modernize and update the 1911-style pistol. These companies are putting a new slant on the classic single-action autoloader by giving it a new look, using modern-day, space-age materials along with generally streamlining the century-old design.

One of these companies is STI of Georgetown, Texas. Best known for its high-end competition guns, STI also makes a line of serious defense and law enforcement pistols, all made in the 1911 design in full-size, compact and subcompact styles. STI is so sure of its advanced design that each pistol is roll-marked with a "2011" logo on the frame, letting the potential buyer know how the company feels about being the 1911 of the next century.

While attending the SHOT Show in Las Vegas, I stopped by the STI booth to visit with the folks from Georgetown and check out their high-end pistols. I took particular note of a two-tone Commander-size pistol that had a double-column-size grip. Being a sucker for two-tone guns, I picked up the gun to take a closer look.

While the STI VIP pistol is two-tone in color, it is actually made from three different materials. The slide is steel, while the dustcover/slide-rail section pointed at a target 10 yards away will result in a substantial loss of accuracy, perhaps completely missing the target.



The VIP proved to be exceptionally accurate with handheld groups, left to right, fired at seven, 15 and 25 yards.

While the STI VIP pistol is two-tone in color, it is actually made from three different materials. The slide is steel, while the dustcover/slide-rail section of the frame is made from cast aluminum. The grip frame/trigger guard is made from black polymer, as is the trigger. The other internal parts and control levers are made from metal for longer service life. The VIP comes in .45 ACP, .40 S&W and 9mm Parabellum, so I arranged with STI's sales manager, Pauletta Skinner, to have a 9mm version sent for test and evaluation.

A 9mm? Isn't that 1911 heresy? I suppose some would think so, but I happen to like the 9mm, and I make no apology for it. First of all, it is an international cartridge, so ammunition for it can be found most anywhere, and quite reasonably priced.

Second, it is easy to shoot, and most everyone can control its recoil. As I quickly approach the magic age of 5-0, I have found that I suffer from a few maladies that our wonderful managed-healthcare system has told me are not bad enough to have surgically corrected. Small problems like carpal tunnel in both wrists and ulnar compression in both elbows tend to make my hands numb and fingers tingle.

Specifications: STI VIP

Manufacturer:

STI International, Dept. GN/HG
 114 Halmar Cove,
 Georgetown, TX 78628
 (512) 819-0656 www.stiguns.com

Caliber:..... .45 ACP, .40 S&W, .38 Super, 9x21, 9mm

Frame:..... STI-patented modular aluminum, clear anodized

Grip:..... STI-patented modular polymer (reduced length)

Magazine:..... Butt flush, dual stack

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|---|---|
| Capacity: | 10 (.45), 12 (.40), 15 (9mm/.38) |
| Slide: | Blue-steel classic flattop |
| Trigger: | STI long curved |
| Barrel: | 3.9 inch, STI fully supported, ramped bull barrel |
| Safeties: | STI stainless grip, single-side thumb |
| Guide Rod: | STI Recoil Master |
| Sights: | STI front with STI fixed rear |
| Overall Length: | 7 1/2 inches |
| Weight: | 25 ounces |
| Finish: | Polymer-coated carbon slide over aluminum frame |
| Comments: | |
| Competition approvals include IPSC, USPSA, IDPA | |
| STI fixed, tritium sights (two-dot): \$65. | |
| Ambidextrous safety: \$45. | |
| Now available in all-steel version that adds five ounces to the weight. | |
| Price: | \$1,653 |

I am a firm believer that the only way to stay sharp with a defensive pistol is to shoot it as much as possible. These days, a 200- to 300-round shooting session with a .45 or even a .40 leaves me hurting. Not so with the 9mm, so I carry and shoot the 9mm. For the record, I think a bigger bullet is a better bullet, but I would rather be practiced with my carry gun than just have the good feeling that comes with a bigger bullet.

Contrary to what many people may say, the 9mm is an effective cartridge in antipersonnel actions. Working in law enforcement for 28 years, I have seen a fair number of people who have been shot with the 9mm and ended up deceased, and deceased quickly. While I am the first to admit that a bigger bullet is probably a better bullet, I can't help but wonder how much better. I mean, how much more tissue can an extra .10 inch touch? I have no idea, but I don't let it stop me from using the 9. I just load it with quality defensive ammo and hit the street.

When the brand-new VIP arrived, the first thing I noticed as I took it out of the box was that it was equipped with a Richard Heinie rear sight. I am a big fan of the Heinie sight, as I feel the design really helps draw your eyes to the front sight. The bold, square rear sight with its serrated black face reduces glare and allows the eyes to 'see through' the rear window with a crisp view of the front post.

The front black post is made by STI and is nice and wide. Its black color does not work well for me, as my aging eyes do not allow me to quickly pick up black-on-black sights anymore. If the gun were to be my carry gun, I would simply fix this small shortcoming by either painting the front sight orange or applying a piece of orange tape.

The single-action trigger is right at four pounds, with a reset that was measured right under 1/8th inch. This should be one fast-shooting gun. The trigger was quite crisp, with no hint of creep or over-travel. Quite simply, the trigger was excellent.

The triggerguard was square, with molded checkering on the face. I'm not a fan of square trigger-guards, as I don't feel that wrapping the support-hand index finger around it results in a solid grip. But it works for some, so to each his own. The checkering that was molded into the pistol grip was just about right. It was sharp enough to offer a solid hold, but it was not so sharp as to abrade the hand.

The magazine well was quite wide, as are all double column magazine pistols, and it had a slight bevel. The bevel could be increased, and if I were to carry this gun, I would spend about five minutes with my Dremel tool and fix this slight problem. However, I admit to being picky, and most will like the magazine well just as it is.



The tapered barrel and specially designed recoil guide rod are displayed during a firing sequence.



The grip, triggerguard and trigger are made of high-tech polymer.

A high-shoulder beavertail and upward-canted Commander-style hammer are "new age" additions to the 2011 pistol.



A fast shooter, the VIP easily handled eight-yard plate-rack runs in less than three seconds. While this will not win the IPSC Nationals, it will certainly go a long way towards defensive proficiency.

One of the controversies of the 1911 pistol is whether it should have a full-length guide rod. I admit that I don't care as long as the gun works. New-generation semiautos all have full-length guide rods, so I guess I should not be surprised that the VIP has one. Actually, it is a unique design that STI calls the Recoil Master. The dual plunger/guide rod helps absorb felt recoil in all calibers.

The VIP barrel is tapered and locks solidly into the slide. This is probably the reason for the exceptional accuracy displayed by the 9mm VIP, as unsupported handheld groups touched one another at seven yards, almost touched one another at 15 yards and grouped into 2.5 inches at 25 yards. Yep, this was one fine-shooting gun. John Motil, a top-notch custom gun smith in his own right and an instructor at the Tactical Defense Institute (www.tdiohio.com) in Southern Ohio, spent an afternoon shooting the VIP and pronounced it "a real shooter." I could not agree more.

The VIP digested more than 500 rounds of various ammo styles and fed all without a single hiccup. The Cor-Bon 115-grain jacketed hollowpoint +P is one of the most destructive bullets currently available. However, due to its severely sharp cavity profile, it can jam in some guns. STI's unique magazine followers hold the top bullet at a high angle so that it feeds almost directly into the chamber. This allows sharp-nosed bullets like the Cor-Bon to feed with total reliability.

Most of my shooting was done with Federal's Expanding Full Metal Jacket (EFMJ) and Cor-Bon's Pow-R-Ball ammo, as I feel that these unique designs are the future of defensive ammunition. Bullet designs that push or crush flat, in my opinion, are going to prove to be the most reliable performers in actual shootings.

This is a custom-grade gun that comes from the factory complete with everything you need. There's no need to send off this gun to the custom gunsmith.

While the cost of the VIP maybe outside the reach of many, if you have the money and don't mind spending it on the very best, take a hard look at STI's VIP. It is everything you need in a defensive pistol without any unnecessary fluff.
