

## The Complete Book of the 1911

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# Tactical STI 1911s

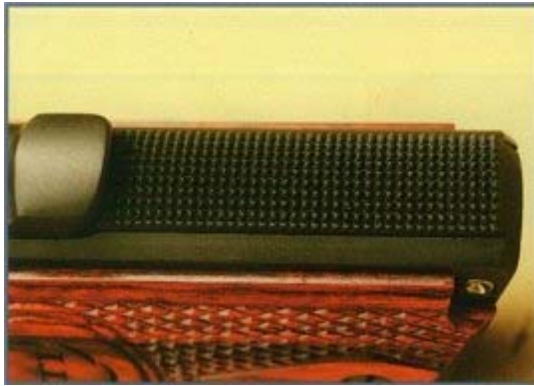
**The Texas gunmaker's sense of style brings out a hard duo for serious lawmen and competitors.**

**By Patrick Sweeny**

**M**ost shooters who think of STI think of hi-zoot IPSC guns, heavily modified blasters meant to win in competition. In the defensive and tactical world, hard chrome, .38 Supers and compensators are not the hot ticket to have. There, matte black and, lately, light rails are de rigueur. Well, never let it be said that Dave Skinner, the head honcho of STI, ever let grass grow under his feet.

For those of you who haven't been paying attention, Dave and STI have been making tactical and defensive pistols for some time now. He was kind enough to send me a couple of sample guns, with enough options between them to satisfy just about any discerning 1911 consumer.

First up is the single stack. The "Duty One" is an all-steel single stack in .45 with a light-rail dustcover. At 39 ounces, it is not the heaviest Government-size 1911 I've weighed. The light rail adds a bit of weight but not enough to make it heavy, and the weight is added out front and under the slide, where it can do the most good in dampening felt recoil. From the top, the slide has a Heinie slant rear sight and a dovetail front in the Novak pattern. As a nice touch, the front sight is locked in place with a small set screw. I'm sure if you feel the need you can have the sights in whatever night-sight configuration you find most useful.



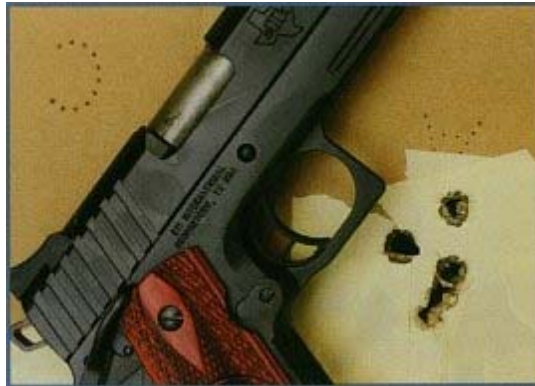
The mainspring housing, flat, checkered and nicely done.



Light in place, the Duty One is ready to go into the night.



The London Bridge Trading Company makes holsters to hold a light-equipped sidearm.



The Duty One shoots all the loads tested into very nice groups. Here, Black Hills 230-grain JRN produced a group just over two inches center to center.

The slide is flat topped and has cocking serrations front and rear. The ejection port is lowered and flared in the standard and distinctive STI style. The barrel is a coned bull barrel, with the STI Recoilmaster dual-recoil-spring system installed to cycle the slide.

The barrel is ramped to provide complete case support, so you can use even .45 ACP +P loads without needing to worry about blowing a case. (In a more likely situation, the ramped barrel provides extra support to the cases used in reloaded practice ammo. You're more likely to run into a blown case with "budget" or "brother-in-law" reloads than any factory ammo.)



The Duty One uses a coned bull barrel and lacks a bushing.



The extractor is a standard design, just like John Moses Browning made them in 1911. In 30-plus years of 1911 shooting, I think I've broken one extractor, maybe. I can't remember if it was broken or just chipped and if I found it while doing routine maintenance or even if it caused a problem. In any case, I don't get all fluttery over the prospect of standard extractors causing me problems.

The frame is where the real action is on the Duty One. The dustcover is lengthened and machined to be a light mount. Or laser mount or, if you have Dave Skinner's weird sense of humor, a bayonet mount. Yes, he made a bayonet to fit the mount, just to be sure of getting people's attention at trade shows and the like. No, he doesn't make them, but I'm sure if enough people ask he'll figure out a price. The longer dustcover adds a bit of weight but probably only a couple of ounces. (It is difficult to get a hard-and-fast weight difference as minor differences in other dimensions can affect gross frame weight.) The dustcover is also beefed up. To make sure the cover doesn't crack with the weight of a light, the frame is made slightly wider, the radius of the frame at the dustcover is squared, and the bottom of the dustcover is a bit lower than standard.



**The checkering is very nice but not done by hand, as evident by the top groove (used to clean up the last row of checkering).**



**The Heinnie slant rear sight. Note the glare busting serrations on the eye-ball end and a Alan set screw--just in case.**

To fit standard parts to the slightly thicker frame, STI has recessed the locations for the slide-stop lever and safeties. The trigger guard is squared, but that is more cosmetic than anything else, to match the squared trigger guard of the polymer-framed STI models. You could have a gunsmith checker the front of the trigger guard if you wanted, but it has been a long time since that was a hot IPSC "must-have" item.

One detail that you won't see on those older guns with checkered trigger guards is a raised radius behind the trigger guard. Being able to get your second finger a bit higher on the frame is one of those minor details of a competition gun that can pay big dividends. To see it on a production gun is a good thing. STI has done a good job of blending the various curves. That and the excellent checkering provide a secure, nonslip grip. The front is done in 40 lpi while the flat mainspring housing is done in 30-lpi checkering. Sharp, clean and with no flats or overruns, the checkering is first-class.

The safeties are an ambi for the thumb safety with a reduced paddle on the right side. I have a particular problem with ambi safeties in that my grip is very high on the gun, and most ambi safeties bind against the first knuckle of my right hand. The STI is reduced enough to clear, but just barely. People with normal-size hands won't have a problem.

The grip safety is a high-ride that looks very Ed Brown-ish, with thumb-knuckle clearance scallops. The bottom of it has a speed bump to ensure you get the safety off when you need it. The Duty One shipped was blued carbon steel. You can have it with adjustable sights or night sights, you can have an oversize magazine release, and that's about it. What you'll get for your \$1,800 is a single stack as solid as an anvil, and you'll have to add the "must have" goodies that make your heart sing. (I can't think of any right now.)

Shipped with the gun was a single magazine from Metalform, the obligatory instruction book and a disassembly tool to take the recoil spring out, all in a lockable plastic box. Not included was the now- ubiquitous fired case. I don't know if Dave doesn't ship to places requiring cases or since it was going to a gun writer he simply didn't bother.



The Duty One is meant to be a solid sidearm that can take a light, whether for home defence or street duty.



As a backup for an entry job, or a duty gun with the right holster, the Tactical Lite offers a lot of capacity in a compact and relatively lightweight package.



Hot ammo and light guns are usually a chore to test. But not the Tactical Lite soaked up recoil a lot better than you'd expect an aluminum-frame would.

When it came to reliability testing, I could have phoned in the results. Were I the type to find range time boring I would have been bored by the testing. I hauled a selection of ammo along, factory hardball and hollow points, some factory lead, a bunch of reloads and a box marked "misc." The Duty One gobbled up everything I had, including the miscellaneous box.

Lest you think I'm feeding an expensive loner gun garbage ammo, the "misc." box is range pickups from law enforcement classes. Invariably, when we go to clean up the range, there is loose ammo lying with the brass. (I run a clean range, and we always police brass.) The ammo is always factory as the price for State Bid ammo is so low no one bothers to bring reloads. But no one is too keen on mixing Remington with Winchester, hardball with hollowpoints, when their department mandates one or the other. Rather than present the brass mill with a problem, we sort out the live stuff. That is the "misc." box. One load I was particularly interested in was the old Speer 200-grain HP load. Back in the day, when we were shooting lots of howling pins, the Speer 200-grain hollowpoint over 6.3 grains of WW-231 was the load of choice. But I have heard from some using their dwindling supply (Speer no longer makes the bullet--the machine wore out) that the load was not always reliable in a ramped-barrel gun. Not so with the Duty One.



**This Tactical Lite came in the popular .40 S&W, but you can have it in 9x19mm and .45 ACP as well.**

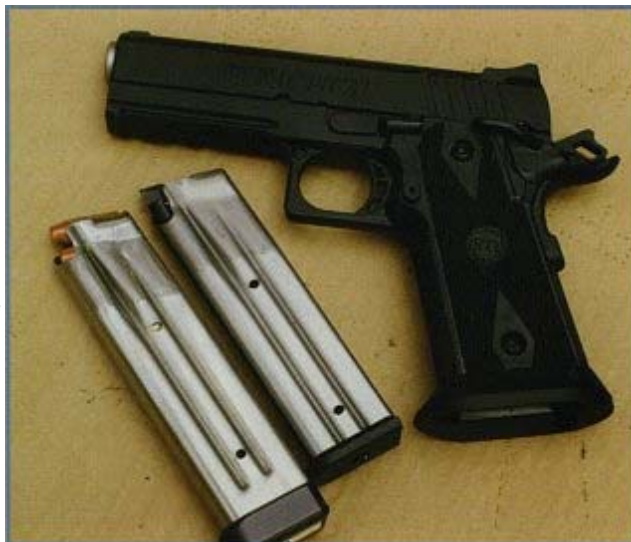
As for accuracy, the Duty One had plenty. I shot it over sandbags at 15 yards. (I would have done so at 25, but all the ranges were set up for a match, and I didn't want to move anything and cause problems for the chief range officer.) At that distance the Duty One would easily shoot one- to two-inch groups, which is about what I can do while fully caffeinated and after hauling my gear down from the parking lot.

While more accuracy is better, you could easily find a tackdriving load from the factory for defense, duty or qualification. Once again, the Oregon Trails 200-grain lead bullet and Vihtavuori 310 load was the most accurate. I'm convinced that if you have a gun that won't shoot accurately with anything else, it will shoot with this load. And if it doesn't shoot with this load, it needs some work.

After accuracy testing I spent a relaxing afternoon hammering the plate rack, our various pepper poppers and trying a few drills. At no time did the Duty One give me the slightest problem. If I did not already have a couple of shelves of the safe packed with reliable and accurate 1911s, I might ask Dave what he wants for this one. As it is, I'll just have to send it back.

Not everyone can use a .45. Some departments don't allow it. Some even mandate a particular caliber and load. (Detroit, for instance requires use of .40 S&W with a 180-grain FMJ bullet, perhaps the most overpenetrative combination extant.) Some shooters want more capacity than a single stack can deliver, and others want to save a little bit of weight. The Tactical Lite model Dave sent me is built on the high-capacity STI frame with an aluminum receiver, Commander length and with a light rail machined into the dustcover.

At 29 ounces empty, the Tactical is noticeably lighter than the Duty One. With its (now legal) hi-cap magazine, it holds 16 rounds of .40 S&W, 15 in the magazine and one in the chamber. The slide, like that of the Duty One, has a Heinie slant rear, dovetail front and a flat on top. Unlike the Duty One, the Tactical does not have front grasping grooves, and the slide is full profile out to the muzzle. There are no recoil-spring tunnel scallops on this slide. The barrel is a coned bull barrel with integral feed ramp.



**The difference between a 126mm magazines and a 140 isn't much. But in competition, and defense, having a couple more rounds can be vital. In 9x19 and .38 Super, the Tactical Lite packs 18 rounds into flush magazines.**

While the integral ramp is useful but not always needed in .45, in .40 it is essential. Where the .45 operates at 17,000 PSI, the 40 operates at twice that pressure. A weak case from a commercial reload or the one-in-a-million overpressure factory load could blow a .40 case. While a blown .45 is cause for gun cleaning and a new magazine, the extra pressure of the .40 often trashes a gun, with few salvageable parts. Underneath the barrel, the slide is cycled via a Recoilmaster recoil-spring, dual-spring assembly. The extractor is a standard 1911.



**Dave Skinner has a wicked sense of humor. Here is his special accessory for tactical-railed guns (he must have seen an 1837 Elgin Cutlass Pistol)**

The dustcover extends to the end of the slide, and the slabside slide lacks recoil-spring scallop cuts. In appearance it bears a resemblance to the original model 1900 that Browning designed and Colt made. While the Tactical is lighter than the Duty One, the extra weight of the slide puts the balance forward of where it would otherwise be. The thumb safety is an ambi, and I have no problems with it banging against my knuckle. The hi-cap frames sit just enough different in my hand that the safety-bump issue I have with single-stack guns doesn't exist. The grip safety is the standard STI unit, with knuckle scallops and speed bump. The frame on the grips and magazine portion is a synthetic unit bolted to the aluminum frame rails and barrel cut section. The grip has cast-in checkering while the aluminum mainspring housing has machined checkering.

The Tactical Lite comes in 9mm, .40 or .45; your choice of plain, fiber optic or tritium night sights; and the same black polymer-coat finish on the slide and type II anodizing on the frame that everyone else gets. You can get a Commander or Government-length slide.



**The Duty One is soft in recoil.**

At the bottom of the frame we run into the one feature most likely to bring howls of outrage to the tactical set: a magazine funnel. "Not kosher," some would say, and others would object to it on the grounds that it can't be concealed. On the other hand, I have talked to officers on raids who expended all the ammunition in their weapon and had to reload. At the moment they needed a reload, anything that would have made it faster and more certain would have been welcomed. If you really have to conceal it, then take it off. All you need to do is drift out the mainspring housing pin, remove the funnel, and replace the pin with a standard-length pin. Done.



**The test-fire volunteers never fail to show up for free ammo. Who can blame the?**

Considering the amount of gear an entry officer already has and the bulkiness of it all, a magazine funnel isn't going to be noticed, nor is it likely to get hung up on a door or window. And I find that the magazine funnel is well positioned to act as a brace against the bottom edges of my hands. With a pair of nomex gloves on, the Tactical (or any STI with a funnel) is practically locked to my hands and doesn't go anywhere under recoil.

And recoil is what you're going to get if you feed this lightweight blaster top-end ammo. While standard practice reloaded ammo or factory hardball were sedate, the hotter stuff was quite a handful. The new Cor-Bon Powrball comes back right smart into your hands but is easy to control once you realize it isn't going to hurt. (I've shot handguns that hurt to fire. Fun is fun, but those weren't.) As for accuracy, the Tactical matched its bigger brother for groups. I found it easy to punch two-inch groups with it, and when the force was with me and the wind wasn't making the target stand dance, I could get groups down almost to an inch. It never failed to work with any ammo I had brought--a collection of hardball, hollowpoints and softpoints.

The Recoilmaster dual-spring recoil system does a good job of soaking up the recoil generated by hot loads, and you might be fooled by how soft the standard loads feel--you may think you've got some wimpy practice ammo instead of the full-power stuff. The now-standard magazines will hold 15 rounds of .40 S&W. If you send them off to a wizard like Dave Dawson, he can tune and adjust them to hold 17 rounds. If you go up in size from



The mag funnels locks my hands in place when I'm using glove. IPSC competition has driven this modification.



The 126mm magazine disappears into the mag well.

the flush-fit 126mm magazines to USPSA Limited-class 140mm magazines, you can have tuned magazines that will hold 19 or 20 rounds. In other calibers the flush magazines will hold 18 rounds of 9mm or .38 Super or 13 rounds of .45. Again, with tuning you can get one or two more.

But what are they for, and how can you carry them? The simple answer is that they are for shooters who feel the need to have a light-rail option. For tactical use, or uniform carry where the department allows single-action pistols, either of these and a tactical light would be very useful. While it may be a bit of a struggle to find a duty holster that fits one of these, fits departmental holster regs and looks good, tactical officers have no such problems. (A duty holster will almost certainly have the light off the sidearm when carried.)

London Bridge Trading Company makes a thigh rig for light-mounted sidearms. Either would fit, no problem. And if you wanted to carry with the light someplace else, any holster it makes would hold these sans light. Blackhawk also makes holsters to fit either light-mounted or -dismounted railed sidearms.

And for those looking for a competition gun, you'd be hard-pressed to find one better out of the box. Now, you won't be allowed to use either of these in an IDPA match, but no one will give you a second look (unless you've practiced and are doing well) shooting one of these at a USPSA/IPSC match. For pins, steel and just impressing the heck out of the guys at the local club during the monthly match, an STI tactical gun goes a long way.

### Magazines

I had one of my test crew comment, "The Duty One ships with one mag? What's up with that?" Well, there is no lack of reliable single-stack magazines available. In the old days we'd worry about finding good ones is as easy as falling out of bed. I tried the Metalform the Duty One came with and a collection of Wilson, McCormick, Novak, Ed Brown and unknown magazines I have on hand. All worked. So, why should STI ship you extra magazines that it would have to charge you for when you may well have settled on another brand as your

before I had it, having that magazine would have been a felony. Some readers question the wisdom of possessing something marked "LEO-Only" in case some overly ambitious or under-educated back-woods officer sees it and attempts an arrest based on 'stolen police property." Maybe, for a week or two after the ban sunset. But by now word has spread to all that the markings are meaningless. If you're worried, save this article, and point it out to the officer, desk sergeant and shift commander. But then, if it gets as high as the shift commander, you've probably got a

dependable supply? good case for a suit for false arrest brewing. More likely, if you do get stopped, a quick phone call or radio call to the station will clear up things.

And the Tactical, shipping with a magazine marked "LEO/Export Only"? Now that the Assault Weapons Ban is history, the markings mean nothing. Except for readers who live in benighted People's Republics where state law still bans hi-caps, we can all own what we want again. And the markings simply mean they were made then, but not banned now. I expect in some distant future that magazine collectors will try to track down old LEO-Only marked magazines to fill their collections. But for now, it simply is a curiosity and a reminder that a week

That said, should you have your magazines tuned for extra capacity? My approach would be no, not unless you find the magazine unreliable as-is. The tuned competition magazines can be a bit more touchy about reliable feeding when treated to harsh conditions. I'd rather have the extra reliability margin than the extra round or two.

### CHRONOGRAPH RESULTS

#### STI Duty One vs. Commander, .45 ACP

<b>Brand and Load (grs)</b>	<b>Duty One</b>	<b>Commander</b>
Remington Golden Saber	230867	816
Remington Golden Saber	185995	923
PMP 220 JRN	872	837
Black Hills 230 JRN	767	727
PMC 230 JRN	806	779
Zero 185 JHP	870	824
Hornady 200 XTP	893	852
Speer Gold Dot 230	842	823
W-W Ranger SXT 230	856	833
Black Hills 185 JHP	981	953
Montana Gold 185 JHP/6.O Titegroup	952	904

Rainier 230 P-RN/4.6 Titegroup	744	713
<b>STI Tactical Lite, .40 S&amp;W</b>		
Black Hills 180 JF	976	
Black Hills 180 JH	971	
Federal Hydra-Shok 16	948	
Cor-Bon 135 PowRBall	1,246	
W-W White Box 180 JFP	846	
Remington Golden Saber 180	890	

*Velocities measured in feet per second 15 feet from muzzle*

**Source**

STI International  
Dept. GNHG 114 Halmar Cove,  
Georgetown, TX 78628  
(512) 819-0656 [www.stiguns.com](http://www.stiguns.com)