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STI TACTICAL 4.15

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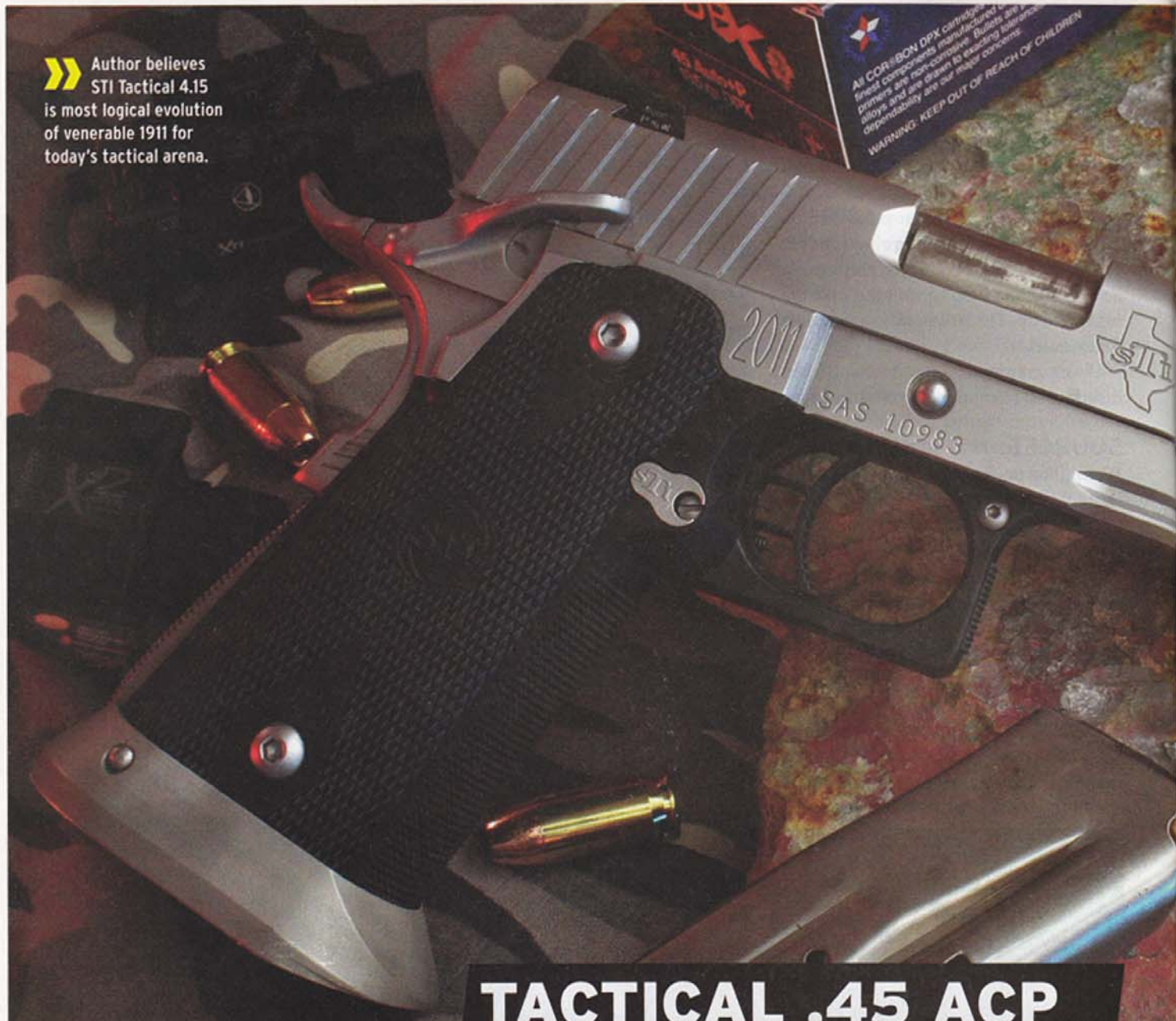
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FIGHT CLUB: TACTICAL RESPONSE FIGHTING PISTOL COURSES
SINGLE AND AVAILABLE: NEW TECHNIQUES REVIVE SINGLE-ACTION REVOLVERS

» Author believes STI Tactical 4.15 is most logical evolution of venerable 1911 for today's tactical arena.



**TACTICAL .45 ACP
FIREPOWER ON TAP**

STI » BY MATT BERGER TACTICAL 4.15

I've been carrying high-capacity 1911s for defense for many years now.

John M. Browning's design is nearing a century of service, with a few modifications to keep the design updated along the way. Among these, the "wide-body" frame—accepting double-column magazines—has been the biggest design innovation.

STI surely wasn't the first to come

up with this concept, though the men with whom the company's roots lie can certainly take credit for pioneering the "modular" frame approach. Introduced to the shooting world at the 1992 SHOT Show, the 2011 platform incorporated a steel receiver and frame, and a synthetic grip. These pistols shaved weight and

girth from existing steel hi-cap designs. The modular pistol is superior in other respects as well, but more on that later.

Early last year, I decided to give the STI 2011 platform a try in the role of both duty and off-duty carry. Partial to Commander-length 1911s, I chose the 4.15 over the 5.0, and since the gun would have to weath-



Hammer remotely resembles Commander style unit, with company's unique rectangular-shaped spur. Safeties are ambidextrous. Note narrowing cut on beaver tail, allowing higher hold.



Thumb safety is extended and serrated. Mag release is smooth and slightly extended.

Beavertail is high-rise unit with memory bump. Factory mainspring housing is flat, checkered unit of glass-filled nylon polymer, though author installed arched checkered stainless unit from Smith & Alexander.



Tactical's cavernous aluminum mag well makes reloads fast and fluid.



er the rigors of duty and the sweltering heat of riding under clothing through the Oklahoma summers, I ordered mine with a hard-chrome finish rather than the standard blue.

RECIPE FOR A TACTICAL 4.15

The Tactical's slide and frame are machined from 4140 carbon steel, and in my pistol, the two were fitted tightly with no vertical play. Neither could I manage any movement in the barrel with the slide in battery. Deeply grooved cocking serrations are cut into the rear of the flat-top slide, and its leading edges are slightly beveled. Spent casings are jettisoned by a traditional internal extractor through a lowered and flared ejection port. Sights are an STI ramped front blade and a fixed



Ejection port is lowered and flared. STI logo on slide.

STI Tactical
4.15 is perfect
for role of patrol or
tactical pistol.



SPECIFICATIONS, STI 2011

MANUFACTURER	STI International
CALIBER	.45 ACP
FRAME	STI Patented Modular Polymer with aluminum mag well
SLIDE	Forged Carbon Steel
TRIGGER	Long curved
BARREL	4.15-inch STI fully supported, ramped bull barrel
GUIDE ROD	Full Length STI Recoil Master
OVERALL LENGTH	7.75"
HEIGHT	5.6"
WEIGHT	33.5 oz.
FINISH	Hard chrome
SUGGESTED RETAIL	\$1,922

Heinie Slant Pro at the rear—both house tritium and are dove-tailed into the slide. The single-dot "Straight Eight" Heinie rear sight has just enough of a shelf to be used to rack the slide on an object one-handed. STI's Tactical Adjustable Sight is optional.

The 2011 frame incorporates an integral accessory rail and full-length dust cover. An STI high-ride beavertail with a memory bump is nicely blended to the frame—unique cuts which narrow the tang also let the grip safety sit lower in the web of the hand. The grip unit itself is glass-filled nylon polymer, meaning the polymer is interlaced with stranded glass for strength. Checkering of 20 lines-per-inch is molded into the front strap, and 25 LPI on the squared face of the trigger guard. Double-diamond checkering is featured on the stocks. The trigger guard is undercut to allow a high hold on the pistol.

button, extended, though not overly so. The slide lock is a standard serrated GI type. The gun is fitted with ambidextrous "gas pedal" style thumb safeties, serrated on top.

The mainspring housing pin securely fixes an aluminum mag well to the grip. While some tactical purists will decry this accessory, none can deny that it's functional, and it presents no problems in a duty or thigh holster. Ultimately, the chute may be removed and the pin replaced with a smaller one for better concealability, if desired.

Rounds are sent downrange from a forged 416R rifle-grade stainless steel bull barrel, ramped and fully supported. Rifling is broached with a rate of twist of 1:16, and the crown is cut at 45 degrees.

I mentioned earlier that the 2011 pistols have more going for them than other hip-cap 1911s. They have the thinnest grip of

any double-stack 1911 I've tried, and it sits deeper and lower in the hand. Other polymer-framed pistols sometimes have soggy triggers and lackluster accuracy due to the flexing of the frame during the pull and recoil. The STI eliminates these shortcomings by employing a steel frame. Only the grip is synthetic. The flex in the grip serves to cushion felt recoil.

The company's unique rectangular hammer is a skeletonized unit. A long, curved, glass-filled nylon trigger cams the sear from under the hammer hooks. The magazine release is a smooth

All of that steel out front, in the form of a full-length dust cover and light rails, helps to reduce muzzle flip, as does the dual-spring Recoil Master guide rod system, which reportedly lasts ten times longer than a conventional single-spring. It also diminishes recoil and muzzle flip by inducing longer slide dwell time to allow magazine springs to react, quicker recovery time and less muzzle dip. Its primary spring is computer designed to expend the bulk of its kinetic energy in the process of stripping the next round from the magazine. The secondary spring is designed to cause the slide to "coast" into battery with only three to four pounds of force remaining, rather than the 12-18 pound spring normally used. This eliminates the slam and thereby the dip.

Internal parts are of quality construction and materials. The hammer and sear are EDM (Electronic Discharge Molding), the extractor is tool steel, and the slide

lock is 4140 carbon steel. The safeties and ejector are MIM (Metal Injection Molded). All parts are hand-fitted.

STI is owned by its employees, who accordingly impart a sense of pride into their finished product and stand by it with a lifetime warranty. The fit and finish of my pistol were impeccable.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Since I'd hoped to carry the Tactical in my duties on patrol, I took advantage of the optional hard-chrome finish. Blue steel is the standard finish, but I worried that it might not stand up to daily carry, both in the elements and under a shirt in hot weather, close to the body. Constant drawing and reholstering are also hard on a finish. Hard chrome also imparts friction reduction due to its hardness.

I favor arched mainspring housings, so I had my gunsmith replace the factory flat unit with a checkered stainless one from Smith & Alexander. This required that he remove some metal from the bottom inside of the MSH to match the gape-mouthed curve of the mag well. I also had my mag funnel

bead-blasted as a matter of preference.

STI 2011 pistols have a strong reputation among competition shooters for being built to extremely close tolerances and requiring an extensive break-in period. To bypass this, my gunsmith lapped the rails and filed a tad of metal from the front of the rails—the only high spots he found.

RANGE TIME

I set out to see how the Tactical would perform. Stapling up Visicolor targets from Champion Targets at 25 feet, I endeavored to fire five-round groups from a standing off-hand position to test accuracy. The pistol acquitted itself very well at this task, firing a best group of .75-inch with Corbon's 185-gr. DPX. Coming in second was Winchester's T-series 230-gr. SXT JHPs with a .81-inch group. The widest group of the day was only 1.31", bringing the average to 1.09".

The trigger broke at a crisp four pounds, with no overtravel. The pistol handled well, with minimal muzzle flip. Initially, I thought the Recoil Master only worked to turn recoil into more of a push than a flip, but eventually I changed my mind. I think

there is also a component of dampened recoil at work there. The gun recovers quickly between shots during rapid-fire strings and seems to be a very natural and instinctive pistol to shoot well.

The memory bump on the grip safety apparently did its job, as I've never had a problem with the safety disengaging, even with a high thumb hold. All controls on the gun are familiar and easy to manage. I didn't miss the absence of serrations or checkering on the mag release button. The mag well never got in the way, making loading like tossing a hot dog down a hallway. Again, I have to emphasize that the slim profile of the 2011 made this the most ergonomic hi-cap 1911 I've handled, and the molded checkering in the grips and front strap make for a nicely textured, sure hold.

The Tactical fired hundreds of rounds smoothly without a single failure. A session of shooting the three-inch steel plates of the "dueling tree" at 20 yards produced gratifying results: steady metallic rings from all but one round from one of the 14-round magazines.

I found that the unusual cut of the bea-

vertail can chafe and irritate the web of the hand after long sessions, but the noticeable difference in how deeply I was able to grip the pistol was worth it.

HOLSTERS

For all of the Tactical's strengths, its only weakness really has nothing to do with the integrity of the gun itself. The gun's squared trigger guard, full-length dust cover and rail drastically limit holster selection. A bit of rooting around did, however, reveal a number of choices.

I contacted Eric Larsen of H.B.E. Specialty LeatherWorks and learned that he makes holsters for this piece. I selected a belt-slide rig with a pronounced cant in dark brown horsehide and sharkskin. I prefer open-topped holsters for concealment and a quick draw.

The H.B.E. rig held the gun securely, housing the trigger guard while allowing a fighting grasp with a holstered gun. As hoped, the draw was smooth and fast after break-in. The forward rake on the belt facilitated good concealment of the grip frame.

This was the only concealment rig I found specifically made for the Tactical. However, I rounded up a few others which were designed for other guns but are a pretty good fit.

Holsters for the Glock 17 apply. Its shorter barrel, squared trigger guard, and full-length dust cover lend compatibility to the STI. To this end, Galco sent its Combat Master Belt Holster, and Desantis sent its Speed Scabbard, both for the G17.

These were close: they allowed a full grasp of the pistol and were very quick, smooth draws, since they weren't tight fitting.

I found that my Slide Guard belt slide from High Noon Holsters—made for a CZ97—fit better yet. This holster secured the pistol as if made for it, while still allowing a full-combat grip with a holstered gun, as well as a smooth, rapid draw.

All of these rigs have a forward cant, assisting the draw and facilitating concealment. All cover the trigger guard area, a safety concern, and all are made from cowhide, save for the H.B.E.

I also received a Model 567 Custom Fit belt holster from Safariland, in Colt Commander length. The 567 can be adjusted at the factory to fit a diverse variety of

pistols. The holster is low cut for ease of draw, covers the trigger guard, allows a fighting grip on the pistol, and has an adjustable cant, allowing even a cross-draw. Gun belt threads through a slotted polymer plate on the back. It features Safari Laminate finish, and I requested the carbon fiber look. A suede lining protects the gun's finish. I wore the gun concealed quite a bit and found it to be comfortable and swift to draw. To my surprise, the holster fit the STI perfectly.

Fobus gave some help with a mag/cuff

carrier for a Para High Cap (a perfect fit) and a box of "close fit" holsters to sample. Strangely enough, their Tactical Elite paddle for the Walther PPS was an exact match. This rig allows a full grip, protects the trigger guard and has a slight forward cant.

Thanks to all the manufacturers who helped in my quest to find holsters that work well for the STI Tactical 4.15.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In the end, STI's Tactical 4.15 is a

great pistol, tight and accurate, stolidly reliable, with a barrage of big-bore firepower on tap. This one's been riding both in my duty holster and my concealment rigs on a daily basis for about a year now, and I couldn't be happier. My bet on hard chrome was correct too, because the gun has shown no sign of wear or corrosion. The chrome has gotten slicker with the round count, as has the trigger. There'll be no changes in my selection of duty weapon in the foreseeable future. ●

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