

Feature STI International GP6



Gentle Blend

STI's GP6 is a radical departure for the company, but it's a well-designed melding of concepts new and old in a great handgun.

Sometimes it's like watching a moth's fatal attraction to a flame when firearm manufacturers get the itch to try something new. Some remain reserved in their exploration of uncharted territory, while others heed the siren's call and gallantly step far outside the box.

The success rate is low, but occasionally these unexplainable urges have produced some exotic offerings to the shooting community—to the point their names still resonate. Companies like Glock and Para-Ordnance prove there's always room for something new and models like the BDM, Delta Elite, GB, P7 and Sigma emphasize the fact that gun guys remain eager to embrace the right kind of change.

STI International is the latest company to venture outside the box, or more specifically, expand its lineup beyond the venerable 1911 platform upon which it has built such a sterling reputation. The GP6 is the company's first double-action, polymer semi-automatic pistol.

STI's origins are deeply rooted in action pistol competition, an area the 1911 has dominated both in Limited and Open USPSA competition. Given that, it's little wonder STI has been so successful producing a variety of single-action pistols over the years.

Needless to say, when I learned of the STI GP6 I was perplexed. Given the company's reputation for quality firearm design, however, some research was in order.

A call to STI's Mike Boyett, who prefers going by the enigmatic *nom de guerre* of "Rabbit," set me straight. As it turns out, the GP6 is the sixth variant of the K100, a pistol that was originally produced by Slovakian firearm manufacturer Grand Power (GP). The K100 developed such an impressive performance and reliability track record in USPSA Production Division competition in Europe, STI President Dave Skinner took notice. It wasn't long until STI was contracted as Grand Power's sole distributor and importer for GP K100

pistols. But, STI doesn't just produce run-of-the-mill guns, a reputation Skinner intended to preserve. To that end, all of the pistols are reworked at the STI factory, including installation of a variety of the company's parts to improve their overall function and reliability—making an already good gun, much better.

There are those who will incorrectly dismiss the STI GP6 as little more than just another lightweight, polymer-framed semi-auto. There are, however, subtle aesthetic nuances seen on several revolutionary semi-autos of long ago, possible clues to its designer's inspiration. The grip shape is reminiscent of Steyr's GB, while the placement of grip texture and the slide's slight contour at the muzzle is reminiscent of Browning's BDM. Unlike most of today's polymer semi-autos, the GP6 sports a single-action/double action trigger, an external, skeletonized hammer and ambidextrous thumb safety, magazine release and slide release, similar to the CZ 85.

Despite its lineage, the GP6 shouldn't be viewed as geared strictly for competitive shooting. The paddles sport a non-obtrusive, low-profile BDM-like contour, suggesting the additions were included with combat in mind. The same can be said regarding its integral accessory rail. Both the backstrap and grip are comfortably textured, while a central bordered portion of its frontstrap and trigger guard is lightly serrated. Both should provide enhanced handling and purchase. The pistol's single-action pull was crisp and light enough for carry, measuring a tad more than 4 pounds with minimal take up and over-travel, which is standard on an STI 1911 and not bad at all for a SA/DA trigger. Its double-action measured slightly over 8 pounds—below average for revolvers and semi-autos. Taking the pistol's firing pin-block safety into account, I anticipated it to be much heavier. However, the pull was smooth and consistent, with no discernable indication of stacking toward the end of the stroke.

The slide on the GP6 sports an unusual tri-cut contour that gradually steps down and away from low-profile sights on the pistol's flattop. Their three-dot configuration also suggests they are intended more for combat. However, closer inspection reveals a characteristic not typically found on combat sights: windage-adjustable capability via a supplied key. Yet, given its 4¼-inch barrel, the pistol could easily lend itself to either duty or undercover use.

The ejection port is of typical European design, with a diminutive, oval-shape on the right side of the slide. While the design never fails to conjure mental images of reliability-related malfunctions, given STI's commitment to quality, I dismissed them before they could take hold. Generously proportioned serrations offer enhanced purchase, which is a definite plus given the nature of the GP6's short slide.

With its ambidextrous features, SA/DA trigger and enhanced ergonomics, the GP6 offers a level of versatility



Top: The STI GP6 is a culmination of features from some of the most proven and reliable service pistols. By combining them into a sleek, polymer-based platform, the result is a lightweight semi-auto capable of either competitive shooting or self-defense.

Left: Textured panels, along with a serrated frontstrap and trigger-guard face provide comfortable grip, enhanced purchase and controllability, all welcome features—especially when shooting +P ammunition.

unlike any other polymer semi-auto on the market today. Internally, the pistol reveals the same degree of out-of-the-box thinking—not to mention exercise in eye-hand coordination and patience. In a departure from the typical Browning-style, short-recoil system that has dominated the semi-auto pistol market for the past century, the GP6 employs a unique alternative by creating a locked-breech system with a rotating barrel lock, similar to the Beretta Cougar and PX4 Storm. The rotation is accomplished thanks to lack of contact between the barrel and frame-mounted recoil spring.

When the pistol is fired the barrel and slide move backward together

and the barrel is rotated counter-clockwise by a flat, twisting, helical cut in the barrel extension. Once the barrel and slide have moved to the point where the barrel has twisted about 45 degrees to the left, the slide is free to continue travel, while the barrel's movement is stopped by an interface to the frame via the barrel extension. The barrel also contains a proprietary square-shaped lock, easily visible at the ejection port with the slide fully forward. This shoulder is rotated behind a solid column of steel

Despite its low-profile, wedged-shaped design, characteristics commonly seen with fixed combat sights, the rear sight of the GP6 is actually windage adjustable with a manufacturer-supplied key.





With an external hammer and a trigger system similar to the CZ 75, the STI GP6 can be carried utilizing multiple degrees of readiness, unlike many of today's polymer double-action semi-autos, including hammer down or cocked-and-locked as seen above.


self-defense handgun, given its versatile nature I decided to accuracy test it first at 25 yards. Don't get me wrong, pinpoint accuracy has its place—whether a handgun was designed for competition or self-defense. There's nothing wrong with a self-defense handgun capable of precision-grade accuracy, but when it comes to evaluating a self-defense semi-auto, I tend to focus more on how they perform at typical combat distances and consider it merely a bonus if they group well at longer range. Out of the three loads tested, the GP6 displayed the best accuracy with Hornady Ammunition, grouping 2½ inches from a bench. Despite its lightweight polymer frame, recoil was

the action functioned smoothly with regrettably no discernable difference between the GP6's cam-like recoil system and the age-old Browning. Yet, there's something to be said for reliability.

Rapid fire was just plain fun, thanks to the pistol's almost non-existent reset, which allowed me to just barely ease my finger off the trigger to allow the sear to reset during shots. This STI may be a double-action semi-automatic, but it functions and handles like a 1911—I was in love. At 21 feet, group sizes ranged from 1 to 2¼ inches.

My dislikes concerning the GP6 are very few. Given the absence of a live-round indicator, the location and size of the ejection port make a press check difficult under low-light conditions. In addition, its hard-plastic carry case also left a lot to be desired because its two tabs failed to keep the case firmly secured, while the interior offered no option for storing the manual and other accompanying literature behind the foam inserts.

Its origins may be found in competitive shooting, but the gentle blend of some of the best features found on proven semi-automatics come together to make STI's GP6 something special indeed. It is a unique semi-auto built to fit a variety of needs with battle-proven, time-tested designs.

Forget what they say about first impressions—the STI GP6 is far from just another polymer-framed 9 mm. And unlike that moth terminally attracted to a flame, STI won't get burned by this introduction, nor will shooters wise enough to give one a whirl. 

Specifications

STI International GP6

Manufacturer: STI International
(512) 819-0656, www.stiguns.com

Type: Recoil-operated, semi-automatic

Caliber: 9 mm

Capacity: 17+1

Barrel Length: 4.15 inches; 50CrV4, Nitrocarburized, or stainless steel; rotating barrel

Rifling: Six-groove, 1:10 RH

Overall Length: 7.9 inches

Height: 5.15 inches

Width: 1.1 inches across the steel, 1.2 inches across the grip

Weight: 26.1 ounces

Frame: 30 RC, chrome moly steel with tactical rail

Slide: 4.15 inches, Tri-top with front and rear cocking serrations

Grips: Textured polymer

Sights: Fixed front with low-profile windage adjustable rear, 3-dot configuration

Trigger Pull Weight: 4 pounds, 8 ounces SA, 8 pounds, 10 ounces DA

Accessories: Storage case, spare magazine, bore brush, rear sight adjustment key

MSRP: \$656.44

Shooting Results

Ammunition

	Average Velocity	Group Size		
		Smallest	Largest	Average
Cor-Bon 125-grain JHP+P	1,224	1.75	2.00	1.75
Hornady 115-grain JHP/XTP	1,075	1.00	2.00	1.40
Winchester 115-grain ST/HP	1,121	1.25	2.25	1.85

Velocity measured in fps at the muzzle for 10 consecutive shots with an Oehler Model 43 chronograph. Temperature: 69 degrees Fahrenheit. Accuracy measured in inches for five consecutive, five-shot groups at 21 feet.

and runs the length of the slide forward of the ejection port when the slide and barrel are fully in battery.

It's worth noting field stripping the GP6 is similar to a Makarov, because it involves pulling the front of the trigger guard down and out of the frame. The slide can be then lifted from the frame.

I couldn't help wondering what type of effect this new recoil system would have on accuracy since the vertical, cam-like movement of Browning recoil system would not be a factor. With pistol and ammo in hand, I headed to the range to find out.

Although I was primarily interested in the performance of the GP6 as a

quite manageable, which I attribute to the ergonomic grip contour, moderately low bore axis and the extra weight of its 17-round magazine. No malfunctions occurred during testing;



In keeping with its unconventional appearance, the GP6 contains a rotating barrel design as an alternative to the century-old Browning-style recoil system. While the pistol performed flawlessly during evaluation, the author found nothing to suggest it improved accuracy or overall reliability.