

With its V.I.P. pistols, STI International (Dept. ST, 114 Halmar Cove, Georgetown, TX 78628; www.stiguns.com) has made use of modern technology to produce a compact, defensive handgun. The V.I.P. pistol is based on the tried-and-true 1911 foundation, but it comes with some very interesting twists. And, as I have found, they are twists that really work quite well.

The STI V.I.P. is a 10-shot autoloader with a 3.9-inch barrel and an overall length of 7.5 inches. It has a full-length grip but weighs only 25 ounces.

STI accomplishes this light weight by using a two-piece modular grip frame. The upper portion of the grip frame is alloy while the trigger guard and grip are polymer. Actually, the grips are just an integral part of the polymer frame construction. It is a very durable yet lightweight setup.

STI also uses its own long, curved, target trigger. The thumb safety is a single, combat safety. And the grip safety is an extended design that protects the web of the shooting hand-its lower end has what we have come to call a "speed bump" for more positive deployment. The flat mainspring housing is also polymer. The front of the grip frame and the mainspring housing are checkered for a more positive grip, even with sweaty hands.

The V.I.P.'s stainless slide sports dovetailed front and rear sights. The rear sight is a fixed, combat variety of Heinie design and comes with a broad, serrated rear face. There are no sharp edges to this affair; and it offers a bold, clear sight picture that can be acquired quickly in a combat shooting situation. The pistol has a Commander-style hammer that is of STI's own design.

The V.I.P.'s 3.9 inch bull barrel functions without the usual 1911-style barrel bushing. The barrel also has an integral feedramp that allows for positive feeding of ammunition from the magazine into the chamber. With its one-piece guide rod, the V.I.P. is truly a small, lightweight pistol that chambers the good .45 ACP defensive cartridge and functions very reliably.

SPECS

STI V.I.P. .45 ACP Semiautomatic Pistol

Manufacturer	STI International 114 Halmar Cove Georgetown, TX 78628
Operation	Recoil-operated single-action autoloader
Caliber	.45 ACP (9mm), .38 Super .357 SIG, .40 S&W also available)

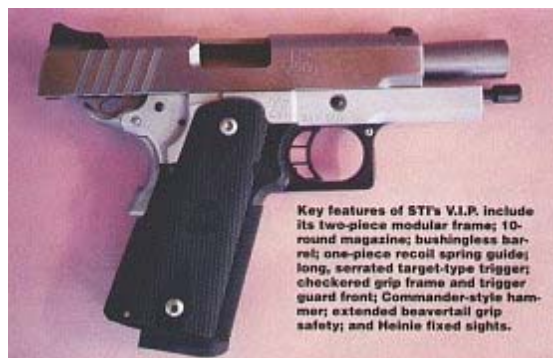
Barrel Length	3.9 inches
Overall Length	7.5 inches
Weight, empty	25 ounces
Safety	Grip and thumb safeties
Sights	Heinie fixed combat
Stocks	Integral polymer frame
Magazine capacity	10 rounds
Finish	Matte stainless slide; black polymer frame
Price	\$1699

The pistol that I tested was in .45 ACP caliber; but the company also offers the package in 9mm, .38 Super, .357 SIG, and .40 S&W Currently, the suggested retail price of the STI V.I.P. is \$1699.

The VIP At The Range

In order to put the V.I.P. through its paces, I selected an assortment of .45 ACP defensive ammunition, including Black Hills's 230-grain FMJ, Hornady's 230-grain FMJ, Cor-Bon's 230-grain JHP and Federal's 230-grain Hydra-Shok. I also threw in Cor-Bon's 165-grain Pow'R'Ball round. This loading has a polymer nose plug that gives the bullet a rounded, softpoint look. On impact, the nose plug assists in causing the bullet to expand.

I reviewed the V.I.P. by firing groups from a sandbag rest at a range of 25 yards. The Hornady 230-grain FMJ load gave the best overall accuracy results by turning in an average group size of 2.5 inches. The Federal Hydra-Shok load produced the next smallest group size with a three-inch average. Full details are listed in the accompanying chart.



During my shooting tests, I found that the Heinie combat sights delivered the various 230-grain loads to approximate point of aim at 25 yards. The lighter weight 165-grain Pow'R'Ball load printed its groups just a bit low, as might be expected from a lightweight, high-velocity round. However; the STI V.I.P. pistol delivered all of my test loads into an area that would provide one-shot stops in a defensive situation.

Shooting the V.I.P. demonstrated that its barrel locks into battery very tightly, which is always an aid in accurate shooting of 191 1-style pistols. The STI long, target trigger broke smooth and clean at four pounds. A clean-breaking trigger and a good set of sights are an extremely important aid to accurate shooting, and the folks at STI seem to be perfectly aware of this.



Early on in my tests I ran into two slight problems with the V.I.P.. The first was the fact that it would not always chamber a round into battery. However, in less than 50 rounds of firing, the pistol must have loosened up and smoothed out because it fed subsequent rounds flawlessly. The second problem was that the magazine did not always seat properly, but as I continued my tests, the problem seemed to take care of itself.

Neither of these problems is serious when breaking in a new pistol. Small burrs will often be smoothed out as a pistol is fired. And it is the reason that a person should do quite a bit of practice work with his pistol before carrying it for defensive purposes.

I particularly like the fact that STI has chosen to utilize a full-size grip frame for this concealment pistol. I am not a big fan of the shortened grip frames that are often found on 1911 concealment guns because they don't seem to

According to Jim, STE's .45 ACP V.I.P. is extremely lightweight yet balances and points

well, is comfortable to shoot, and is capable of impressive accuracy.

leave you much place to put your little finger. Unless the shooter has very small hands, the standard grip length, just like John Browning designed it, is really the best way

to go. And, while we're at it, the checkering on the grip frame should not be very sharp because this can gouge the shooter's hand and slow down his draw. STI's checkering gives a positive grip without discomfort, and that's the way it should be done.

"With the V.I.P. pistol, STI clearly has a winner on its hands."

The STI V.I.P. offers a lot of pistol in a pretty small package, and STI has provided a 10-shot capacity while keeping the overall weight down to 25 ounces. This compares very nicely when you consider that the standard government model 1911 weighs in at some 35 to 37 ounces. The V.I.P.'s grip circumference is only slightly larger than the average 1911 pistol, depending upon what grips you are using, and is still small enough to offer good concealment qualities.

During my speed-shooting drills, I found that the lightweight V.I.P. pistol was not at all unpleasant to shoot. Recoil in this 25-ounce 1911 was still very manageable.

Shooting STI's .45 ACP V.I.P.

Factory Load	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Standard Deviation (fps)	Extreme Spread ((fps)	25-Yard Accuracy (inches)
Cor-Bon 165-gr. Pow'R'Ball	1126	15	22	4.25
Black Hills 230-gr. FMJ	748	17	40	3.75
Cor-Bon 230-gr. JHP +P	886	16	13	3.75
Federal 230-gr. Hydra-Shok	826	11	13	3.00
Hornady 230-gr FMJ-FP	785	16	15	2.50

NOTES: Accuracy is the average of five five-shot groups fired from a sandbag benchrest at 25 yards. Velocity is the average of 25 rounds measured 15 feet in front of the gun's muzzle.

The fit and finish of my sample STI V.I.P. are very good. The pistol balances and points well, and the sights are quick to acquire. That and the smooth, clean-breaking trigger make the pistol a serious contender as a defensive handgun. But the most important factor about the V.I.P. is the way that stainless steel, alloys, and polymers have been combined to reduce the pistol's weight and still allow for a 10-shot magazine capacity.

With the V.I.P. pistol, STI clearly has a winner on its hands.
