

Handguns 2000 Buyers Guide

Two New Big-Bores

STI Eagle 50-45 and CZ97, both in .45ACP are ready for the millennium!

By Frank James

With the year 2000 creeping nearer and nearer the national buzz about the coming millennium is increasing to a frenzied level. First, there is the concern about the mother of all computer crashes-the Y2K problem, as well as the simple anxiety about life in a modern world beyond the turn of the millennium.

What will it take to succeed and provide for a family? Will the Clintons, Al Gore or Bill Bradley succeed in outlawing the private ownership of handguns for the average American citizen in the years ahead? No one knows the answers, for sure, but law abiding citizens and gun owners in particular have suffered a serious degradation of rights over the past eight years, so the future in some respect may not appear to be as bright as it was some time back..

There is one bright spot now, however -- the quality of the handguns being offered the self-defense consumer and those interested in a reliable handgun for home defense. It is my firm belief the handguns being manufactured and sold today are the best available in terms of overall quality.



The STI Eagle 50-45 represents the high end of the big-bore defensive pistol spectrum available to the consumer in the next millennium.



The STI Eagle 50-45 demonstrates just how far a design can develop if left unmolested by intrusive politicians who banned high-capacity magazines.



gentleman could have imagined. In fact, this design is so good the world was convinced it was the future until Clinton and Reno tag teamed the '94 Crime Bill through Congress and outlawed the new manufacture of high-capacity ammunition feeding devices; i.e. over ten-round capacity magazines.

Even though high-cap magazines are now no longer manufactured for

Recently, I had the opportunity to work with two pistols, both in .45 ACP caliber. One was a high-end pistol and the other was more of a mid-market product, but both offered features and advantages not found with many of their competitors. The two pistols were the ST' Model Eagle 50-45 and the CZ-97.

The ST' Eagle 50-45 could actually substitute for a military Special Operations SOCOM pistol because of its overall quality, while the CZ-97 will serve the average citizen requiring less in terms of product development but still needing a accurate, reliable defensive double-action/single action semi-auto in .45 caliber.

STI Eagle 50-45 Details

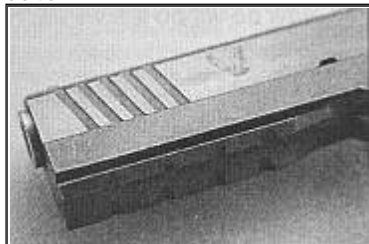
STI pistols have earned their spurs on the IPSC competition circuit and they represent the zenith of development for the 1911 pistol design. Introduced in the early nineties, the STI design follows the 1911 pattern for a classic single-action autopistol, but it does it in a state-of-the-art modern method.

The STI pistols all feature a subframe of steel that is surrounded by a polymer grip. The slide, of course, differs little from the one designed by John Moses Browning and the end result is a high capacity gun that carries Browning's original design beyond anything the great



The Competition influence is seen on these STI pistols with the width of the "gas pedal" manual safety lever.

ordinary citizens, older pre-ban magazines remain available. Of course, the market has recognized their limited supply and these limits are reflected through outrageous marketplace prices. (As to future past the year 2000, Senator Feinstein wants to outlaw all high-capacity magazines. Isn't that something to look forward to?) All of this is important because the STI gun I tested was a wonderful gun and an excellent example of how far the 1911 single-action design can be taken if the commercial market were left unmolested. Yes, it is a high-capacity design and, yes, extra magazines for a gun like this are expensive, particularly so with the present federal law, but if you value well designed and well constructed small arms, then you are sure to appreciate the STI Eagle 5045.



The Eagle 50-45 has a dust cover accessory rail to mount accessories, including white light tactical lamps.

To start with, the STI Eagle 5045 differs from other STI designs in having a dust cover (that area of the frame forward of the trigger guard) that is nothing more than the weaver-style rail turned upside down. The importance of this extra feature and added weight cannot be ignored because this feature provides the self-defense consumer with a perfect solution for those things that go bump in the night. The dust cover rail provides for easy installation of an accessory tactical lamp, an essential item for identifying strange noises and persons during the dark morning hours. The mounting of white light tactical lamps on defensive pistols was first seen on SWAT-style entry teams, but the idea makes sense for civilian home defense scenarios as well. Additionally, the use of the tactical lamp can avoid the problems associated when misidentification of a threat or target occurs. Yeah, the threat turned out to be your drunken neighbor and you know he's suffering yet another bout of brown bottle confusion and represents little or no potential harm to your family. With the threat

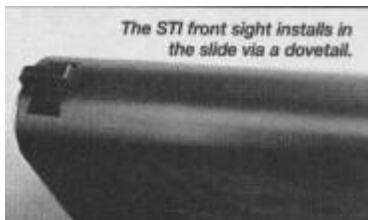
clearly identified you can put the gun away, turn the lights on and call his wife or the police, whichever in your opinion will be the most severe form of punishment for his nocturnal disruption.

While other pistols require the use of a dedicated lamp or light built specifically for that particular model, the nice thing here is all you really need are a set of weaver-style rings and a one-inch diameter police style flashlight. The weaver rings will mount directly to the dust cover and the flashlight can be mounted with the rings in the same manner that one would mount a scope sight.

It would be an injustice to say this is only the reason one should purchase the STI Eagle 50-45, because this pistol is an exquisite piece of equipment. It comes with all the bells and whistles one could expect to find on the best grade of custom match-grade 1911 -style pistol.



The Bomar fully adjustable rear sight has become the standard for all competition-style pistols.



The STI front sight installs in the slide via a dovetail.

The polymer grip is a good place to start our examination because even though it's a high-capacity design, the grip still feels good to the person with a small to medium hand size. Yes, even short-fingered shooters like myself can still reach the trigger and do it comfortably.

The front portion of the grip is checkered, and even though it's plastic, it's still sharp and crisp to the touch. The slide features front cocking serrations and here they are necessary when doing a chamber check because of the full length frame/dust cover and the corresponding guide rod.

The STI Eagle 50-45 has wide "gas pedal" ambidextrous manual safeties, a high-arched grip safety with memory pad at the bottom and a slotted hammer. The barrel is a full profile unit and adds where weight it is needed on any handgun -- at the front.

The trigger is a carbon fiber unit that has been proven on the IPSC competition trail and the trigger pull on the test pistol was absolutely a dream. It scaled evenly and consistently at three and a half pounds. Additionally, there was the minimum of slack or monkey motion in its movement.

How It Shoots

Shooting the STI Eagle 50-45 was such a pleasant experience that it is hard to find fault with this well-made pistol. About the only criticism I can voice is it is not a good concealed carry pistol. Oh, I suppose someone could conceal and carry this pistol, but then they would probably be the size of the Jolly Green Giant and really may not need a gun for protection. They would be big enough to use any log that was handy.



The grip safety on the Eagle 50-45 had a high sweep arch and a memory pad.



This test STI Eagle 50-45 was capable of putting round after round through the same hole and, with its thirteen-round high-capacity magazine, it really is a damn good home defense gun when fitted with an accessory white light tactical lamp. All in all, it shot with match grade accuracy and came with features found on only the most highly developed special operation government pistols. It is certainly worth your examination if you want a high-end pistol and a gun that will accept a tactical lamp for home protection purposes.



The CZ-97 I tested was not as finely developed as the STI Eagle 5045, but both pistols represent a vast improvement over the models seen just a couple of decades back from both domestic manufacturers and importers. One never knows what the future holds for each of us; as individuals or as a class of gun owners who value our personal freedoms. One thing I'm convinced of as we head into the next millennium is the handguns being built and sold today currently are probably the best we have ever seen and these two pistols represent their class of big-bore pistols quite well in terms of fit, finish, workman- ship, accuracy and reliability.



