

20 Ahern Under the Gun: Choose (

By Jerry Ahern, Photos by Sharon Ahern

Customizing a weapon personalizes it to the owner. Over the years, I've had a number of firearms that I've had personalized or I've accessorized to a great degree. Some of them are still with me and some of them are not. Of all the novels Sharon and I have written over the last 30 years or so, those in *THE SUR-VIVALIST* series are definitely among the most popular. There are a number of customized guns that appear in the series. The character of "Natalia," for example, is gifted with a brace of Smith & Wesson Model 686 .357 Magnums. Six-shooters, they have been round butted, fitted with a crane lock, action tuned to buttery smoothness and the barrels were slab-sided. Every sharp edge was removed and the guns were bright polished. They wore Smith & Wesson finger-grooved Goncalo Alves combat stocks. On the right barrel flats were engraved American Eagles, the engraving gold filled. All the work was done by that magnificent revolver smith and refinisher Ron Mahovsky of Mahovsky's Metalife (mahovskymetalife.com).

There were never actually two of these Metalife Custom L-Frame revolvers. There was one, and I own it. Rather than the gold-filled American Eagle on the right barrel flat, there's my name. About 18 months ago, as this is written, I removed the Goncalo Alves combat stocks and replaced them with Crimson Trace LaserGrips. I don't think "Natalia" would have minded.

"Natalia" was a Russian agent, but with a heart of gold – not just gold filled. As such, she was probably familiar with the AK-47. I got into AKs late in life. The first one I seriously interacted with became a project that my son-in-law, Danny Akers, and I worked on together. It was a WASR rifle from Century International Arms (centuryarms.com) with a standard fore end. We removed that and replaced it with a Command Arms fore end with a Picatinny rail that would allow further accessorizing. The rifle already had a folding stock from Tapco. An early Crimson Trace fore end pistol grip unit that was a laser only and made for AR-15s was added. At the time that we modified the rifle, ammo was in short supply across the country and adding a laser was a good ammo-conservation measure, as well as the means

by which to provide some assistance to my less than marvelous rifle marksmanship. To further make this rifle more versatile, I acquired clips for holding two magazines side-by-side and also a five-round magazine, which comes in very handy if one were to shoot from the prone position, the 30-round magazines that are normally seen for such guns

(except in California and other misguided areas) too long for convenient prone shooting or accuracy shooting from a bench rest.

Some guns start out as if they were custom, of course, and the Detonics USA pistols about which I have written so often are perfect examples, coming from the factory as they did as ideal combat pistols. I pride myself as not being into "gilding the lily," but when Detonics USA was searching for the perfect black finish to go on a very

limited number of the all stainless steel pistols, I volunteered my CombatMaster to be a guinea pig. We had already tried some finishes on stainless steel sample pieces and even had an entire gun or two done by way of auditioning a finish. Nothing was sufficiently durable.

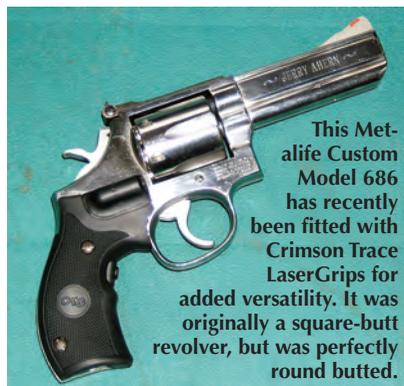
At last, we discovered Ion Bond (ionbond.com). The firm did proprietary finishing work for a number of well-respected companies. A file was applied to a sample piece with the finish and not until the seventh pass with the file did the finish show the

first small sign of wear.

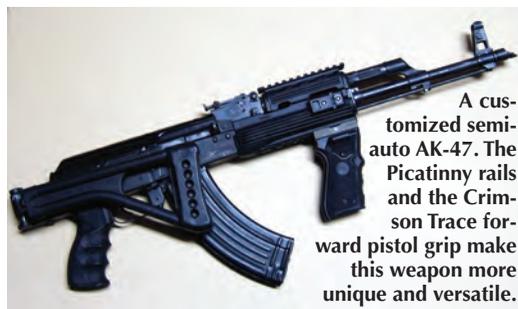
Off went my CombatMaster and, if memory serves, a couple of additional CombatMasters. When the pistol returned – in pieces, of course – everything went together just as it had before, the actual dimensional increase the finish imparted negligible. I've been using that gun through

the years ever since. I think it has been cleaned once. Often, I just stick it in my waistband. I don't even wipe it off. The stainless steel underneath that "Detonics Black" finish isn't poking out anywhere on the gun. I liked the finish so much that I had it applied to a full-sized Model 9-11-01. The finish looks and wears equally outstandingly.

Customizing a weapon can be as simple as swapping grips or adding a laser, having a Mag-na-port (magnaport.com) job or something as complicated as taking a handgun and totally altering it. During the 1970s and even into the 1980s, such work may have reached its peak of populari-



This Metalife Custom Model 686 has recently been fitted with Crimson Trace LaserGrips for added versatility. It was originally a square-but revolver, but was perfectly round butted.



A customized semi-auto AK-47. The Picatinny rails and the Crimson Trace forward pistol grip make this weapon more unique and versatile.