STI’s Very Imp

The STI VIP is a 1911-pattern auto pistol built around a four-inch barrel and corresponding length slide, with the grip frame also slightly shortened for great concealability.

The STI VIP concept results in a gun about the same overall size as a Colt Commander, albeit with a slightly wider grip to incorporate its double-column magazine.

The STI VIP’s slide stop is recessed into the side of the gun’s wide frame.

VIP’s frontstrap features molded-in 30 l.p.i. checkering.

Story and Photos by Duane Thomas

When STI discontinued its VIP in 2006, the first I heard of it was when I called up STI to ask for an article sample. Recently, the VIP was reintroduced. VIP stands for Very Important Pistol, and in my opinion this is not hype. While the STI VIP is available in 9mm, .40 or .45, I believe it reaches its best efficiency as a 9mm. If you happen to like (a) 1911s, (b) the 9mm Parabellum cartridge, it would be difficult to imagine a gun that makes a better combination carry/self-defense/match gun than this one.

Handling the STI VIP, my overwhelming impression is of a Colt Lightweight Commander – considered by many folks for decades to be the ultimate martial artist’s carry gun – with a more hand-filling grip. The polymer frame has molded-in 30 l.p.i. checkering on its frontstrap, diamond checkering on the side “panels” and a checkered mainspring housing installed. The lugged beavertail grip safety was nicely “sensitized” out-of-the-box, i.e. it would always disengage no matter how loosely, or in any other fashion, I held the gun. Trigger pulls came in at 5-1/4 pounds.

The gun’s recoil system is called the Recoil Master, consisting of two springs and two guide rods reciprocating within and around each other. STI claims – and my own shooting supports this – the Recoil Master decreases felt recoil and muzzle flip, especially in 9mm (not so much in Major-loaded .40 or .45 however). Early Recoil Masters had breakage problems. About two years ago STI redesigned and upgraded the Recoil Master. Since then, they report zero breakage in 9mm; when they do see breakage at all it tends to be on .40s and .45s that have fired 100,000 rounds or so of Major-power-factor ammo.

The gun’s double column magazine tapers down severely at top, thus is much smaller than the mag well. With just a little practice the big mag well/taper-top magazine combo makes for fast and easy speedloads. STI states a magazine...