

# 9mm, Done Right: STI LS 9<sup>11</sup>

Reviewed by Peter Caroline

One of my shooting friends recently asked me, "Is 9mm Luger the new .380?" The question was asked in jest, but there's definitely a ring of truth here. The pocket .380s that we went gaga over just a few years ago are now being supplanted by compact handguns chambered for an older and more powerful round. Lord only knows, I've fired and/or reviewed quite a few of them. Many were of modern polymer construction; a few were more traditional steel or lightweight alloy. No one is complaining about any lack of choice.

At the 2012 SHOT Show, I was hanging out at the Dillon Precision booth. Directly across the aisle from us was the STI International display. This Georgetown, Texas, outfit has an enviable reputation for building superbly crafted 1911-style pistols (they also make excellent AR-style rifles and an assortment of sights and other parts, but that's another story). I

wandered over to take a look, and discovered a really fascinating little 9x19mm pistol, the STI LS 9. And it is indeed little. Overall length, including a generous high-ride beavertail, is just 7". The ramped, linkless barrel is 3.4". The slide measures an ultra-slim .765" in width. This is an all-steel pistol, weighing a solid 26.6 ounces. There are some guns that feel just right when you pick them up and, for my hands at least, this is one great example.

The LS 9 incorporates the legendary STI build quality and attention to detail in a truly pocketable pistol. The slab-sided slide features fore and aft "bullet style" cocking grooves. The short main-spring housing is meticulously checkered, the trigger guard is undercut and the front strap is stippled. The rear of the slide is finely milled, and the sights are an integral front and Heinie low mount rear. The trigger features an overtravel adjustment, which is a bit of overkill for a compact gun, but nice nonetheless. Grip panels are checkered cocobolo with the STI logo.

I took the LS 9 to the range with an assortment of ammunition: Remington 115-grain JHP, Winchester 9mm NATO 124-grain FMJ, Speer Lawman 115-grain FMJ and some odd Berdan-primed 115-grain FMJ NATO surplus, head-stamped "VPT 58." The LS 9 magazine has wit-

ness holes for eight rounds, but seven were all I could manage to stuff into it, even using my UpLULA magazine loader.

Shooting from a sandbag on the bench at 15 yards, the best seven-round groups I could accomplish initially were about 4", and low and left, regardless of ammo. I was puzzled that a high-quality handgun with a crisp four-pound trigger pull couldn't do better than that. Since the rear sight has no elevation adjustment, I raised the front sight until the bottom of that sight was flush with the top of the rear sight. With that unorthodox sight picture, I suddenly was able to print 3/4"-1" six-round groups. So, I'm happy to report that the LS-9 is quite capable of shooting tight little groups, far more than adequate for its intended (defensive) purpose. Function was 100 percent, from the very first magazine-full out to several hundred rounds. And, it is a very pleasant gun to

shoot, very stable and no sharp edges.

After shooting comes clean up. As much as the LS 9 appears to follow standard 1911 design on the outside, things get rather interesting inside when you disassemble it. As I've said countless times before, RTFM. In this case, the owner's manual is excellent, with very easy-to-follow

instructions. You simply remove the magazine, clear the chamber, cock back the hammer, align the disassembly notch with the slide stop and remove the slide stop pin. There is no conventional link on the ramped barrel. There is a cam block and a unique spring assembly, and it's all very simple to disassemble, clean and put back together...*once you read the instructions.*

The STI LS 9 comes in a roomy, lockable hard-case, complete with a small padlock, owner's manual, hex head keys for the grip screws and rear sight, and a recoil spring assembly takedown tool. What is missing is a second magazine. C'mon, folks.... for an MSRP of \$1,001.53, you might throw in a spare magazine. That minor complaint aside, this is a very high quality little gun... it's built right, it feels right, and it's certainly the right companion for these uncertain times.

**STI International, Inc. • 114 Halmar Cove •  
Georgetown, TX 78628 • Tel.: 512-819-0656 •  
STIguns.com**

