

Ahern Under the Gun:]

By Jerry Ahern, Photos by Sharon Ahern

A reader of my column here – and, I did try to get back to him, but our E-mails wouldn't mesh, apparently – commented on a recent installment in which I offered some ideas on weapons to have around for a seriously rainy day. Happily, he liked what I wrote, but had a good suggestion of his own. Why not include weapons chambered for the ubiquitous 9mm Parabellum?

Like a lot of people, when the wondernine craze arose, I had several different varieties. Then, I turned away from 9mms for several reasons, eventually getting into “wonderforties,” like my SIG 229s. But, with the 9mm being so widely used, it's hard not to re-involve oneself with the round. The 9mm Parabellum is one of our older cartridges, of course, seeing at least as considerable use as the .45 ACP throughout the span of the 20 th Century. It has been criticized in recent

years as a poor man stopper, this arising out of the cartridge's use by the courageous men and women of our armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Judging a pistol cartridge based on its military performance is, these days, grossly unfair. Military ammunition, because of the Geneva Convention, is supposed to incorporate Full Metal Jacket (FMJ) bullets. Although standing around and getting shot with one or more 9mm FMJs

isn't recommended, it's probably not as potentially lethal as taking the same number of rounds when the bullet in question is a properly constructed Jacketed Hollow Point.

The 9mm pistol is, in fact, very well suited for personal defense with the proper ammunition aboard. I recently tested a quite interesting, pocket-sized 9mm personal defense handgun from Taurus (taurususa.com), their Model PT 709 Slim. It's a little gun with big gun features.

Length overall is just at 6", height 4-1/2" (including the height of the nicely melted rear sight). The pistol is 3/4" thick. Capacity for the 709 Slim is seven plus one. The 1911-ish thumb safety (up is safe, down is fire), the slide release and the magazine release are not ambidextrous. With a firearm of this type, that won't be terribly inconvenient for those one out of every nine or so people who are port-siders.

One reason why ambidexterity isn't a huge issue is built into the trigger. There is a lever type safety built into the trigger, depressed by the natu-

ral action of pulling the trigger. This works totally independently of the thumb safety. The action is DA only, not terribly heavy and quite smooth. A third safety is the automatic firing pin block. Only the most rearward movement of the trigger deactivates the block.

The PT 709 Slim is a polymer-framed pistol, the slide and barrel stainless steel. The black frame and the matte finished slide look rather professional and attractive as a combination.

The black, three-dot sights are coarse enough for easy pick up in a hurry and, even without the sights, the pistol is such a natural pointer that body-index hip shooting works quite well at very close ranges. I tried the PT 709 Slim that way at about eight feet. Accuracy over the sights at 21 feet and 30 feet was quite good for me – lots of two holes touching in the 10 ring, with 9mms of several different bullet weights, both hollow points and FMJs.

Empty weight on our antique postage scale runs 19 ounces. If memory serves, that's only about four ounces more than the old S&W Airweight J-Frames, with only five shots to the 709 Slim's eight. Both are good guns, of course. Despite its light weight, the 709 Slim is extremely pleasant to shoot. The ergonomic design is quite user friendly. The average man won't be able to get his little finger on

the grip. Roll it under the magazine, which is metal but has a polymer bumper pad.

In short, if you were so inclined, as was my reader, to go to the 9mm Parabellum because of its abundance, the 709 Slim is a pistol you could carry concealed on a day-to-day basis and rely on when needed for action within the more traditional urban combat distances. But, if events take an extraordinary turn and you still want a 9mm at longer distances, one of the most intriguing is the sporter version of the Sterling, from Century International Arms (centuryarms.com). The semiauto Sterling Sporter 9mm Semi-Automatic Rifle is based on the famous British submachinegun, which surfaced in the years immediately following World War II and became, to the British Empire, what the Uzi became to the Israelis.

The submachinegun initially saw very limited assault use during World War I. Although the Vickers gun was used for firing in the forward direction from an aircraft, the Lewis gun, so effective from the aft position of aircraft of the period,



The 709 Slim is little more than palm size and, although a 9mm, it is quite pleasant to shoot. The thumb safety for the Taurus is conveniently located and operates directionally like the familiar 1911.