The Third “Elsie”
Ruger’s LC9

Reviewed by Peter Caroline

At the 2008 SHOT Show, I stood in line to get my first peek at Ruger’s new LCP .380 ACP pocket pistol. Several weeks later, I got one to test. It’s a lovely little gun, and I ended up buying it. I heard that they sold out their first year’s planned production on the first day of the Show. A year later, Ruger introduced the LCR .38+P revolver, another winner right out of the starting gate. At this point, I was starting to wonder…could Ruger pull another one out of the hat? Apparently, the answer is yes.

Once again, at the 2011 SHOT Show, there was another handgun attracting a crowd at the Ruger booth. The signage identified the gun as the new LC9. As I got closer, I could see it looked like an LCP, only a bit larger, and chambered for 9mm. Unloaded, the LCP weighs 9.7 ounces; the LC9, 17.2 ounces. Approximate dimensions (with extension magazine floorplate): LCP: 5-1/4” L x 3-3/4” H; LC9: 5-7/8” L x 4-1/2” H. The LC9 has a manual safety; the LCP doesn’t. The LC9 has a loaded-chamber indicator that pops up, a la Luger, when there’s a round in the chamber; the LCP has a simple view port above the extractor. The LCP magazine holds six rounds of .380 ACP; the LC9 magazine, seven rounds of 9mm. The LC9 slide stays open after the last round is fired; the LCP slide doesn’t. The LC9 will not fire when the magazine is removed; the LCP will. The sights on the LCP are fixed and rudimentary; the 3-dot sights on the LC9 are adjustable and very easy to acquire.

Both LC9s have long trigger pulls. My LCP registered 6-7 pounds; the LC9, 8-9 pounds. This was a bit puzzling. I can see the logic of a long, relatively heavy trigger pull on a pistol with no manual safety, but a heavier pull on a pistol with a manual safety? In any case, the trigger pulls on both pistols are easy to master. Unlike the LCP, the LC9 will not fit happily in a pocket holster in a tight pair of jeans; maybe in a jacket or coat pocket, but it’s definitely more of a compact than a mini.

Never let it be said that Ruger is deficient in the safety department. In addition to the manual safety and the magazine safety, the LC9 features a key operated internal safety and a padlock with a 5” shackle to prevent unauthorized individuals from getting into mischief. In addition, on the right-hand side of the frame, there is an admonition to read the warnings in the instruction manual before using the gun (a simple “RTFM” might suffice).

As one would expect from any product bearing the Ruger logo, the LC9 behaved impeccably well at the range. There were neither quirks nor surprises. The LC9 is not a fussy eater. It digested Winchester 115-grain FMJs and 147-grain JHPs and Russian steel-case TulAmmo 115-grain FMJs quite happily. After some familiarization rounds, the trigger pull was quite predictable and manageable, and 2-1/2” offhand groups at 10-15 yards were easily accomplished. The grip feels just right, nice and slim, and all the edges and corners are rounded. Recoil was moderate, about what you’d expect from a 9mm weighing a bit over one pound.

Ruger says you can use +P ammo on occasion, but never, never, never +P+!

The LC9 appears to be reliable and indestructible, in the Ruger tradition. It’s not a hot little pocket rocket that you can hide in your Speedos. Nor will it win any beauty pageants or bullseye competitions. It is a rock-solid, dependable, compact semiauto, comfortable to carry and shoot, in a caliber that’s more than adequate for personal defense. And, at an MSRP of $443 (probably less in the real world), it’s a hell of a bargain.

With the LC9 you get a sturdy fabric case, an excellent instruction manual, two keys for the internal safety, a hefty padlock with the Ruger logo, a flat, an extra baseplate for the magazine and a $10-off certificate for NRA membership.