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STI's Spartan .45

By Duane Thomas

STI's aptly named Spartan 1911 is intended to give shooters a custom-quality gun at a price the average shooter is actually willing and able to spend. Thus, the Spartan is priced at \$660 MSRP. A major factor allowing STI to offer this gun at that price is that there are no options available. None. You can have a Spartan one way: one finish, one set of sights, in one caliber, etc. This is in contrast to STI's other 1911 lines – like the Trojan – in which, when ordering, you can spec out exactly the gun you want. The Spartan is chambered for .45 ACP; it's available as a full-sized, five-inch barreled, carbon steel, single stack, Government Model 1911. Period.

Esthetically, the STI Spartan is a drab gun. Its finish is Parkerized, the grips feature seriously pedestrian grain, the front sight has an orange fiber optic insert, and the rear is the Italian LPA adjustable.

The heart of the Spartan .45 (what you're really buying) is the slide-to-frame-to-barrel fit, and in this area the Spartan delivers. There's no movement in any of these areas with the gun in battery, either laterally or vertically. STI's goal with the Spartan was to provide a custom level of slide/frame/barrel fit at a non-custom price. I have never before seen a fit like this on anything but an expensive custom gun, much less a piece in the Spartan's price range.

The slide, frame and barrel are made by Armscor in the Philippines. All the other parts (except the LPA sight) are made by STI, which ships them overseas; the guns are built by Armscor, then sent back to STI. At that point, the Spartans are given to STI's quality control people (led by Chris Schirmer) who go over them with a fine-tooth comb. If a problem is found, typically it's easier for STI to fix it in-house; Spartans very rarely go back to the Philippines once they're here.

The Spartan's slide is made from extruded bar stock; the frame is cast. That last fact does not turn me off the way it may some traditionalists. What would tell the tale was how the Spartan kept that great fit once I put some rounds through it. In my experience, if a 1911 is going to shoot loose, it does so in short order. Even many guns that seem nicely fitted out-of-the-box become rattletraps once you put a hundred rounds through them. On the other hand, if a gun's still perfectly tight after a hundred rounds, it's going to be tight for one hell of a long time.

STI's spec for Spartan trigger pull weight is 4.5 to five pounds. My sample Spartan's trigger broke at an even five pounds, according to my NRA weight set.

There were only a few areas on this gun that might be counted as flaws:

(1) Even given the beavertail grip safety's built-up "speed bump," I still found it quite possible to hold the Spartan so the grip safety wouldn't disengage.

Fortunately, any decently skilled pistolsmith knows how to sensitize a grip safety. Actually it's so simple that even many non-pistolsmith-trained end users know how to do the job themselves.

(2) The mag well entrance features those two nice sharp fangs in front so traditional on beveled mag wells – famed in song and story for pinching palm flesh painfully between magazine and mag well during a speed reload, and raising a blood blister. The gun needs to either be fitted with a mag funnel or have those flesh manglers radiused into oblivion.

(3) The magazines suck. Eight-rounders made in Italy by ACT-Mag and now sold in the US under various companies' marques, this design has developed a very bad reputation among serious shooters

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