

NO COUNTRY FOR OLD GUNS? 1911 PISTOL – STILL GOING STRONG AFTER 100 YEARS

By Bob Parker

Google (it's a verb now) the year 1911 for significant events and you'll find many forgettable occurrences, most of them lost in history. It's difficult to find any mention of the United States Army adopting the John M. Browning-designed Colt 1911 pistol in .45-caliber (adopted by the U.S. Marines and Navy in 1913). Pistol trials conducted in the early 20th century by the U.S. military focused on an auto-loading pistol chambering a .45 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol) round. They were dissatisfied with the performance of the .38 Long Colt cartridge against the Moro guerillas during the Philippine–American War (1898-1902). Colt won the competition and their 1911 semi-automatic handgun has now been in the service of the military and law enforcement for a century. It was the official U.S. armed forces service pistol from 1911 to 1985, when it was officially replaced by the Beretta M9. However, it is still in service with the U.S. military, special operations units and a long list of law enforcement agencies. The 1911 and 1911A1 pistols have, over the years, had more manufacturers than we have room or time to name.

The Browning short-recoil system has become the preeminent type, design and foundation for nearly all modern center-fire pistols. It is still relevant after all these years.

Springfield Armory produces the Springfield Custom Professional Model 1911A1 pistol under contract for the FBI regional SWAT teams and the Hostage Rescue Team. It is essentially hand-built in

the Springfield Armory custom shop. It is a quality lifesaving tool that comes with a heavy price tag and limited availability.

A high-end variant of the Springfield 1911 that comes with a more affordable outlay of cash is the TRP. The Springfield TRP (Tactical Response Pistol) has the same design specs as the FBI contract pistol. While not a custom shop product, the TRP is hand-built by experienced Springfield armors, and from my experience, there is no depreciation of performance.

The pistol is assembled from a forged stainless steel match-grade slide and frame. When mated there is no play on either the horizontal or vertical. The TRP has a 5-inch stainless steel match-grade barrel and bushing. This is one tightly fitted pistol no rattle in a battle here.

Unlike some tightly assembled match-grade pistols, the TRP used in testing for this column performed flawlessly. There were no failures of any nature through 1000 rounds. The match-grade aluminum trigger, with an over-travel stop, breaks crisply at a bit less than 4.5 pounds. The TRP comes with a flared magazine well extension, aggressive (deep and sharp) checkering on the front strap, beaver tail grip safety and an ambidextrous extended thumb safety.

The TRP tritium night sights feature a low profile combat rear sight and a dove-



Springfield Armory 1911A1 TRP

tailed front sight blade. The test pistol has a stainless finish. It's also available in Springfield's black Armory Kote finish and with an integral accessory rail.

The recoil spring guide seems to be an issue with many 1911 shooters. The TRP comes with a two-piece full-length guide. You need a small hex wrench to disassemble it (unless it works loose during shooting). This feature, not just on Springfield pistols, has found disfavor with many in law enforcement and the civilian shooting community. It works alright, as does a standard length guide and plug you can purchase at numerous suppliers. For a small investment, the pistol is still reliable and easily stripped without any tools.

The G10 grips have a very aggressive stippling. The front strap checkering and the grips will pretty well assure a positive purchase when holding the pistol, but a prolonged day at the range can be tough on those with soft hands.

Basic ergonomics of the 1911A1 pistol haven't changed in the century it has been in service. It might be an old design, but

the grip-to-frame angle seemingly can't be improved upon. It handles and points on target extremely well. It's thin for a large pistol, which makes it as concealable and portable as lighter, smaller-framed pistols.

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With an overall length of 8.5 inches and height of 5.7 inches, this all-steel pistol weighs in at 42 oz.

As noted above, there were no stoppages in testing the Springfield TRP. Different ammunition configurations, bullet weights and manufacturers were used in testing. Hornady Critical Defense FTX 185-grain and Remington 230-grain bonded JHP rounds were two of the primary test rounds. The TRP isn't particular as to the magazines used. Seven- and eight-round magazines from Springfield, after market sources and three other pistol makers were all completely functional in the Springfield pistol. When a pistol is to be carried in harm's way, reliability should be the first characteristic we look at.

At combat shooting distances of 7, 10 and 15 yards, the TRP delivered .45-caliber slugs on target in ragged holes (and I'm sure

this weapon is capable of accuracy beyond my skill level). Sorry, no accuracy checks shooting off sandbags from the bench with this gun. The real world doesn't work like that. A pistol that shoots well from an unsupported combat stance is what we're looking for.

This all-steel pistol is tough and robust. A shooting partner, using his own TRP, inadvertently demonstrated this on the range. His second round of a failure drill went off with an extremely loud report. He lowered the weapon and noted his shooting hand was numb from the small explosion. His hand was covered with carbon residue. The magazine follower, spring and floor plate were on the ground. The magazine body was still locked in place. Wedged in it was the remaining round. The bullet was pushed completely into the casing. The casing of the fired round had suffered major case head

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separation. The primer was blown out and completely penetrated by the firing pin. He was using reloaded ammunition and it appears that the round may have had a double charge of powder or the wrong powder.

Once he regained feeling in his hand, he disassembled the pistol. Nothing appeared to be damaged, out of place or misaligned. It dry fired, as it should. He had it checked out by an armorer and the pistol was pronounced fit for duty. Four hundred rounds later, the TRP and operator are doing well (and using only factory ammo now).

We live in a world of evolving technology, advancing at a staggering pace. It's almost impossible to keep up with everything new out there. Home computers, smart phones and I pads make all forms of communication around the planet into literally child's play. More information than you can ever use is available with the click of a mouse or a touch on a screen. Yet the 1911 pistol, after 100 years, remains a solid choice for trained professionals in law enforcement and the military. Springfield Armory makes a good one.

In a disposable society where anything or anyone tainted by "age" is cast aside as obsolete or irrelevant, some things and people that have a solid foundation retain their value. It's still a country for old guns and gunfighters.

Stay switched on and if it's not a 1911, carry something off-duty. «



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