

GUN




ISSUE #86

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2010 BUYER'S ANNUAL

NEW
GUN/AMMO
DEALERS

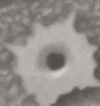


Note the C&S tactical ambi safety, engraved grip screws, and machine stippling on frontstrap, with desert ironwood grips by Wicked Grips.

7.45 LDA

PARA-ORDNANCE INC.
FL. LAUDERDALE FL

MADE IN
CANADA



GUN TEST

CYLINDER & SLIDE LDA .45 ACP

**A Para 1911 customized for
on-duty and all-day, off-duty carry!**

By Daniel Branscome

I have always agreed with the late Col. Cooper that the 1911A1 is the finest fighting handgun of all time. When I was 17, my Uncle Sam gave me one to carry. When I was 19, he gave me 20 of them to care for. I received my first law enforcement training with the Chula Vista, California Police Department, and Chief Winters allowed officers to carry individually purchased 1911's upon qualification, which was very progressive for 1979.

The only reason I stopped carrying the big single-action auto was department policy. Since 1992, I have been employed by a series of agencies that prohibited carry of single-action handguns. Even though that mindset is beginning to change, my current agency still does not allow single-action autos for duty carry. I had planned to purchase a Para USA LDA to use a duty weapon in 2006. A short-lived flirtation with the .45 GAP that mandated carry of the Glock 37 delayed my plan for two years.

Para USA
7.45 LDA was
customized
by Bill
Laughridge
and crew
of the
Cylinder &
Slide Shop.

When Ted Szabo introduced his high-capacity 1911 frame in 1988 I thought that it was the greatest improvement on John Browning's design since its introduction. Having only average size hands, the wide body Para USA gun was never really comfortable for me. It was not a gun I just had to buy, but I appreciated the advancement that it represented. Since then, there are an abundance of imitators offering high-capacity 1911 options.

My first experience with the Para LDA pistols was at their introduction during 2000. It was smoother and lighter than a Smith & Wesson revolver with a first-rate trigger job. Better yet, it was being offered in a single stack configuration. I knew then that this was my solution to the double-action-only policies. My goal was to duplicate my custom stainless steel Commander as a Para LDA.

Gun Details

I was surprised to learn that the gun I wanted was not made by Para USA. I didn't want anything out of the ordinary—a stainless steel, Commander-sized, single-stack LDA. When I first looked at the Para product line, I found that the only guns they offer in that configuration have black or green finishes. Most of my personal carry guns have been customized to some extent, so I set about having a gun made to my liking.

I originally thought to use a Para CCW model as the base gun. I do not care for the Griptor ridges on this model, and I wanted a beavertail grip safety. My reasoning was that it would be cheaper to grind the ridges off the frontstrap and replace the grip safety than to replace the entire top end with a Commander slide and barrel.

Instead, I started searching on gunbroker.com and purchased a used, full-sized .45 ACP LDA to use as a base gun. Because it is the older model, it does not include the Para "PXT" external extractor. The asking price of \$699 was within my budget, and was a bargain because it included a LaserMax internal laser sight. However, I found out right away that the LaserMax switch on the slide stop was not compatible with the BlackHawk SERPA holster. It would not allow the lever on the holster to depress enough to release the gun. It took 10 minutes of careful prying to get the gun out.



Para LDA 7.45 in the Wilson Lightweight IWB Tiger Shark holster, and matching magazine/light pouch holding the Ed Brown 8-Pack mag and SureFire Defender light.



Note night sights, polished grip safety, and machine stippling on Ed Brown Flat mainspring housing.

Disassembled, note the Wilson long barrel link, and National Match barrel bushing installed by Cylinder & Slide.



I already knew that I wanted to replace the factory plastic mainspring housing with Ed Brown's flat stainless steel part so that I could have it stippled. I also wanted to replace the factory sights with night sights. I purchased the parts from Brownells and sent them along with the gun in hope of reducing the turn-around time. I polished the small parts myself.

Custom Details

I had already planned to send the gun to Cylinder & Slide. Their machine stippling is one of the best deals I know of, and I prefer the stippling to checkering because it provides a good gripping surface without tearing up my shirts and coat linings. I contacted Bill Laughridge and discussed my project with him. Since I intended this to be my duty weapon and I was providing a used gun as a starting point, function and reliability were my

primary concerns. I asked for the Para LDA Single Stack Tac II package, and whatever else it would need to be as reliable as humanly possible.

In addition to the stippling on the mainspring housing and frontstrap, I agreed with Bill's suggestion for the most cost effective cosmetic touches, that the flats of the slide be standard polished and the frame garnet blasted. Laughridge warned me that his shop was overloaded with work due to the "Obama Factor," and that I could expect a 10 to 12 month wait. Fortunately, the order I had already placed for the stippling work gave me an advantage.

The standard Para LDA reliability package at Cylinder & Slide includes: lowering the ejection port (as needed) for reliable ejection, deburring and polishing all internal working surfaces of slide and frame (particularly the center rail and breech face), installing a Wolff recoil spring and extra power firing pin spring, installing C&S extended thumb safety, test fire for function and adjust sights for windage at 15 yards. I asked that they substitute their tactical ambidextrous safety for the one included in the package.

In addition to the basic package, Cylinder & Slide also installed the mainspring housing I provided, a National Match barrel bushing, a Wilson long barrel link, and a new extractor. They removed the ball from the slide stop notch, re-contoured the barrel sides, and refitted the slide stop and grip safety for better function. They then re-cut the crown of the barrel at 11 degrees, for improved accuracy.

The main issue in autopistol reliability is the magazine. I have a variety of 8-round magazines, and sent a representative sample of each type to be function tested with the gun, including one of the new Ed Brown 8-Pack magazine I wanted to evaluate. Laughridge told me that the springs were weak in all of the older magazines, and needed to be replaced. I also purchased three of his Extreme Duty Tactical 7-round magazines.

The next issue is lubrication. Cylinder & Slide sends information on proper lubrication with every gun they ship. It is normal to clean guns each time they are fired, but for service weapons carried on a daily basis, that may not be enough. Laughridge recommends the use of one of

the grease products specifically designed for use on weapons because liquid lubricants can evaporate or be absorbed into holsters in just a few days.

There was no special trigger work performed on the gun. According to the trigger pull gauge, it broke at 8 pounds. If asked prior to the actual measurement, I would have guessed it to be 5 pounds.

Another advantage to having an "old guy" gun is the ability to have grips made to your fit and taste, even exotic materials like wood. As a finishing touch I chose the desert ironwood offered by Wicked Grips. I preferred the natural color, but there are some others that dazzle the eyes. Such beautiful wood deserved something special, so I asked Laughridge for a set of their hand engraved grip screws. They offer several different designs, but since they are hand engraved, availability is limited to what they have on hand. Wicked Grips also offers engraved grip screws for that finishing touch.

Range Time

My first opportunity to shoot the Para LDA was my CCW qualification. I fired 2 magazines (with a reload) of the 230-grain Winchester SXT duty loads for the qualification. I then fired 50 rounds of the white box Winchester hardball, and three more magazines of the SXT as a function check. The only malfunction was a single failure to feed after about 85 rounds. No fault of the gun, just my own limp wrist. I was concentrating on feeling the trigger reset. The Ed Brown 8-Pack magazine functioned flawlessly. I will carry it as a spare, because I don't care for the way it protrudes from the butt of the gun.

Accuracy is more than adequate. The test fire target provided by Cylinder & Slide was shot from a rest, and has all the rounds touching, with a single flyer. Practical accuracy in my hands showed the gun printing about a 2-inch group, as fast as I can go, at 7 yards. Three hours of dry practice over a period of three days with gun and holster, and I was ready to carry it on duty.

Now I have a use for all those holsters, magazines, and grips in that box in the gun closet. After so many years of carrying a gun chosen by someone else, it is nice to carry one that is my choice.

For More Information:

Para USA

704-930-7600
para-usa.com

Cylinder & Slide

800-448-1713
cylinder-slide.com

Ed Brown Products

573-565-3261
edbrown.com

Wicked Grips

wickedgrips.com