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By Mike Woodard

Photos by Christian Behr Photography, Joy Haines Management, Miami, FL

"YOU'RE A COP, AREN'T YOU?"

Startled, I looked at the tall, thin man standing beside me. I was off-duty, attending to some personal business in the city, and I had stopped at a local convenience store to pick up a few things. Before I could reply, his face split into a wide grin as he thrust out his hand to shake mine. "You kept my house from burning down that day. Thanks."

His face was vaguely familiar and his words gave shape to the image trying to form in my mind. A few years previously, I had encountered him under other circumstances. I didn't remember the exact details, but I had confirmed a warrant for the man and had to place him under arrest. He became very agitated—not that he was being arrested, but that he had left a pot of rice boiling on the stove at his house. He obviously had not anticipated that he might not be returning as soon as he had planned. Terrified that his house would burn down as he was being taken to jail, I calmed him down and, after securing him in the back of my cruiser, drove to his house, which was only a few blocks away. Obtaining his keys, I went in, shut off the stove and removed the pot. He thanked me profusely all the way to the Dade County Jail. Now, all these years later, our paths had crossed again.

I learned a lesson from that. You never know who you're going to run into or under what circumstances. Later I couldn't help but wonder how many times I passed, unknowingly, in close proximity to one of those I've arrested who might not have such positive feelings about me. Considering that the num-



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ber tallies several hundred, I had to admit that I had been exceedingly lucky to run across this particular arrestee. I also felt fortunate in having long ago decided to always go armed when off-duty.

Making that decision and carrying through with it, though, were two different things. I remember when I first joined my department and began thinking about an off-duty handgun. My duty gun at the time was a four-inch Colt Python. Rookie cops

were not paid very much, so my original plan was to have the big revolver perform double duty and avoid paying scarce funds for a second gun. Good off-duty leather for that particular revolver was a lot harder to come by in those days, though, and choices were much more limited than they are now. Inside-the-waistband holsters were pretty much an unknown concept at the time, so I ended up playing around with a shoulder holster for awhile. Of course, it required the wearing of an outer garment, which didn't work out very well. You haven't lived until you wear a jacket in South Florida in August.

I decided to try another tack. In a trade, I had acquired an old S&W K-frame with a 2.5-inch barrel. It was almost as heavy and bulky as my Python and I quickly learned that revolver concealability is more a function of frame thickness and cylinder width as opposed to barrel length. Likewise, that didn't work out very well either. I

eventually swapped for a Colt Commander and carried that for a few years until the reigning administration at that time decided the line cops couldn't be trusted with .45s. It, too, fell in the heavy/bulky category, but at least it was much easier to carry concealed due to its flatter profile.

Does anyone see a pattern here? It should be obvious that in terms of concealed carry, size and weight do matter. I've talked to numerous people over the years who say that they are indeed aware of the dangers around them and they like the idea of carrying something to deal with such. In the next breath, though, they complain that guns are too heavy, uncomfortable, wrinkle their clothes, etc. To those folks who feel that way, I have good news. Taurus International has destroyed those excuses.

Recently, I was having lunch with Eddy Fernandez, marketing manager at Taurus in Miami. At one point, he

casually mentioned that Taurus had a new firearm coming out and inquired if I would like to examine it. I replied that I might be able to squeeze some time from my schedule to take a glance at it. A few weeks later, Eddy called me to let me know the gun was in. I drove out later and picked it up. The remainder of the evening was spent examining the little gun.

GUN DETAILS

The gun's nomenclature is the CIA, short for Carry It Anywhere. As far as I know, no governmental agency has officially endorsed it, but maybe that's classified information. The gun is a two-inch five-shot .38 Special (listed as the Model 850 in the Taurus catalog) snubnosed revolver and comes packed in its own hard plastic carry case. A separate plastic bag contains the keys for the proprietary Taurus Security System. The version provided to me sported a very attractive matte stainless steel finish. The two-inch barrel contains a full-length undershroud, enclosing the ejector rod. The trigger is a smooth, semi-wide combat type that's very comfortable on the finger.

Throughout, the CIA clearly evokes its

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M85 ancestry. Digging out my own battered old M85CH (concealed hammer), I examined the two side by side. Frame length and width on the guns are practically identical, but there are some differences. Most notable is the small "humpback" extending out from the back of the frame, marking it as a true hammerless revolver. On my CH, the extended frame is missing, allowing the bobbed hammer to be seen moving as the trigger is pulled. The added frame serves a dual purpose, which we'll speak more about later.

Additionally, my CH sports a serrated front sight that begins at the rear of the barrel and extends in a gently sloping ramp all the way to the end of the muzzle. The CIA does away with this arrangement, the new unit being much smaller but still providing a crisp picture. Under most circumstances, that is. Unfortunately, there's no colored insert to provide a contrast with the fixed rear sight—which is, of course, the same color. Most experienced shooters know that this is not an ideal arrangement, especially under light conditions that cause the sights to wash out. It's unknown at this time whether Taurus will offer a night sight option.

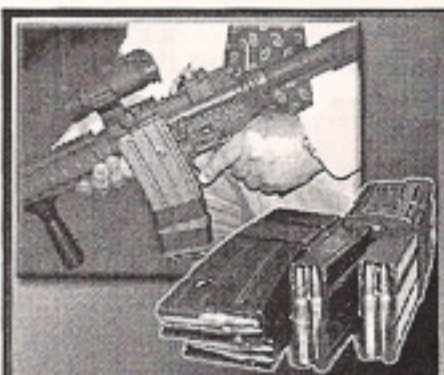
The triggerguard, just forward of the trigger, is compressed to a greater degree than the aft portion of the guard, which is identical to my personal Taurus. Although presenting an aesthetically pleasing profile, it does restrict the amount of space available for the trigger finger. For some reason, I had never really noticed this small detail before. Even more odd, considering my geographical locale, the thought crossed my mind that this could conceivably cause a problem for those

residing in colder climes. For the normal unadorned finger it's no big deal. Those who have to wear gloves, though, could possibly encounter some minor problems. I'm hardly an expert in this particular area but felt I should mention it.

As I had just paid off my large screen TV and wasn't overly anxious to buy another, I triple checked the gun and made sure all ammo was removed from the living room. I then proceeded to dry fire it a few hundred times to get a feel for it. Results were pretty much what I expected. As with most weapons of this genre, it displayed the typically heavy trigger pull I've come to expect from small revolvers. I estimated it at about 12 lbs. (I obtained a pull gauge later and measured the pull at an average of 11 lbs. for all five cylinders). In all fairness, though, Taurus is hardly alone in this respect. Once again, liability rears its litigious head and superb defensive tools are unnecessarily saddled with so-called safety features, i.e. heavy trigger pull, designed to make the gun safer. We here in the gun fraternity, of course, know that making a trigger pull heavier than it needs to be just makes the gun that much harder to shoot accurately, which in my humble opinion makes the gun less safe, not more so. Again, this is not an indictment of Taurus. They just don't want to be sued. I certainly can't fault them there.

On the plus side, for a small revolver, the CIA exhibits a surprisingly smooth trigger pull. Even when pulled very slowly and deliberately, there's little discernible drag. I guess any handheld firearm would benefit from a professional polishing, but I'm not sure the added benefit would be worth-

Taurus stablemates: Model 850, left, Model 650, right.



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while in this case. To be honest, I had halfway expected this to be the case. My personal CH, which I obtained several years ago, had exhibited the same smoothness that was readily apparent in this new offering.

I also noticed that the CIA can be staged to allow for maximum accuracy at extended ranges. Here's how it works for me. With my trigger finger resting on the distal joint, quick, smooth squeeze snaps the cylinder around. As the pad of my fin-

On the plus side, for a small revolver, the CIA exhibits a surprisingly smooth trigger pull. Even when pulled very slowly and deliberately, there's little DISCERNIBLE DRAG.

ger contacts the weapon's frame at the rear of the triggerguard, the cylinder rotation stops and the chamber is locked into firing battery just prior to sear release. The sights can now be adjusted to the desired picture and the shot squeezed off with minimal pressure. Granted, it's not the same as a true SA revolver, but the effect is similar and surprisingly effective.

You can tell just by reading that this is going to take some practice. I've often heard that guns such as the CIA are meant to be carried a lot and shot a little. I tend to disagree to a certain extent. Guns such as these require one to be a little more diligent about training. That is, you need to shoot them more to obtain maximum efficiency. Look, it's a fact of life that the smaller guns are harder to shoot well. Small frames, light weight, short sight radius; all those things that contribute to concealability and ease of carry also conspire to degrade accuracy. The only way to overcome those negatives is to get out there with the gun and shoot it. Fortunately, guns such as the CIA make this an enjoyable challenge.

The rubber grips (standard on the CIA 850) provide a positive, tacky surface allowing for a firm grip, which is especially important for controlling small guns of this type, particularly the magnum versions that can dish out punishing recoil. I have an average size hand (*Please turn to page 77*)

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Continued from page 29

and, for me anyway, the grips fit very well—aided, no doubt, by the palm swells built into the grips. Bigger hands may have a harder time adapting, but I don't believe this will be an insurmountable problem.

I checked my schedule and began planning a range session to wring the little gun out and see what she was capable of. It goes without saying that a quality handgun is deserving of quality leather to carry it in. I subsequently contacted one of the best leathersmiths in the business, Josh Bulman of Bulman Gunleather. I have a couple of his rigs and, in my humble opinion, Josh's work ranks up there with the very best. I told Josh what I was working on and asked if he had anything that could accommodate the new gun. Not having the exact measurements available, we both felt, nevertheless, that the CIA's specs were probably close enough to the M85 for his standard leather for that revolver would work. He subsequently sent me a beautiful matching belt and holster, and topped that off with a speedloader carrier. The holster is a strong side, high-rise that tucks the gun in close to the body. The leather is tightly boned to pro-

vide a firm grip on the weapon. The speedloader carrier is molded to hold an HKS speedloader and I highly recommend this option. Perhaps the biggest weakness of the snubnose genre is firepower. In a gunfight, five rounds can go awfully fast. The spare speedloader is absolutely essential in my estimation. All of the leather came in a rich, mahogany hue and, as I had guessed, fit the gun to a T.

I then began looking around for some ammo. Coincidentally, I had scheduled a photo session for the Taurus with my photographer. We spent the better part of two hours in his studio running a series of test shoots (with the camera, not the gun). After collecting several dozen photos for later perusal, I briefed him on the upcoming range test. He asked me what kind of ammo I was going to use and I told him that I hadn't decided yet. Reaching into his closet, he pulled out a couple of boxes of Black Hills ammunition and asked if I had ever tried it before. It suddenly struck me that I hadn't. No particular reason, I had just never had the opportunity. I knew that Black Hills had an excellent reputation but I guess I just thought of them as a discount reloader. C.J. told me to take it to the range with me and try it out.

A few days prior to my range date, Eddy Fernandez buzzed me and advised that he had just received another CIA, this

one in .357 Magnum (listed as the Model 650) and would I like to try it out? The gun was delivered a few days later, just giving me enough time to call C.J. and try to squeeze in another photo session. After listening to me whine and plead for awhile he caved in and I headed back down to his studio. We ran a quick series of shots and C.J. even produced another box of Black Hills in .357 for the new arrival. I won't bore you with the details, as the new gun is virtually identical to its little sister. The cylinder is approximately one-eighth-of-an-inch longer to accommodate the increased length of the magnum case and the cylinder walls appear to be slightly thicker to contain the increased pressure. The most noticeable difference was the finish. The new CIA exhibited a nicely polished blue finish. Generally I'm not too fond of blued guns, but this was one of the better ones I've seen of late and found myself warming to it. I did notice that the trigger pull on this particular specimen seemed even heavier than the 850.

One of the toughest things about being a gun writer in Southern Florida is finding a place to shoot. The two main public shooting ranges in Dade and Broward counties are roughly 30 to 45 minutes away from my house and, with my schedule, are not always available to me when I need to shoot. Luckily, a Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World

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Continued from page 77

opened for business only a few minutes up the road from me some time ago. They had actually been in business over a year before I learned that they had a small pistol range on their second floor. I've utilized it a few times and it's proven to be a blessing.

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

Arriving there, I unpacked the guns and set up a target. First up was the 850. I loaded the rounds that I had earlier tossed into the water jar. I've always felt that this test is a fairly good indicator of a particular ammunition's integrity. I've seen some rounds that come from cut-rate reloaders with all manner of indiscrepancies. Improperly seated primers or bullets and split brass appear to be the worst offenses. If any rounds with these imperfections are immersed, the water will quickly seep through any gaps and eventually deaden the primers or powder. Some testers like to soak the rounds for a week or so, but I find that an hour or so is generally sufficient to expose any weaknesses.

Granted, it was only a small sample. Nevertheless, the Black Hills ammo performed flawlessly, dinked or not. Likewise, the little Taurus twins performed like champs. I began by shooting four or five gunloads at slow fire, attempting to get an idea of the gun's intrinsic accuracy. By staging the trigger, and slowly squeezing off the round, I was able to obtain groups averaging about 3 inches out to 25 feet, the farthest distance I shot at. I'm sure that, with a little more familiarization, I could obtain tighter groups, but then again, why would you need to? I don't have to explain to the readers that this is not a target weapon designed for sub MOA groups. This is a close-in weapon designed for last-ditch personal defense at knife-fight ranges. In that light, the CIA is fully up to the task and represents an excellent choice for the defense minded individual.

Next, I broke out the 650 .357. Now, I'm not particularly recoil sensitive, but I approached this with a vague feeling of apprehension. I knew that hot 125-grain JHPs, like the Black Hills loads I was about to shoot, could bounce even a heavy revolver to a noticeable degree. I was now going to fire those rounds through a gun about a fourth the weight and size of my Python. The results were about what I expected. It definitely gets your attention when you fire it. Even under the lights in the indoor range, the gun displays an impressive fireball. Which brings up a good



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point. Keep in mind that, should you have to employ the weapon at night, the muzzle blast is going to be very disorienting, especially in an enclosed area. Remember what I said earlier about having to work with this breed of firearm? It's particularly true with the magnum. It's not for the inexperienced or faint-hearted. Accuracy was on a par with the 850, although the groups tended to print lower on the target. It bears repeating. With fixed sight weapons, obtain several examples of the proper caliber, find which one works best for you, and stick with that particular load. My earlier impressions of the trigger proved correct. I had to work noticeably harder to obtain the same accuracy with the magnum.

Along the same lines, the gun, as expected, also exhibited heavy recoil, although muzzle rise wasn't as severe as I had anticipated. I attributed this to the gun's design. The extended humpback frame, which we spoke of earlier, seems to help channel the recoil impulse in a straight line through the hand and extended forearm to help minimize muzzle jump. The recoil is sharp, though, and unless you're a masochist at heart, you'll probably find something else to do before conducting an extended range session. Again, there ain't no such thing as a free lunch. The payoff is at the other end, though. The .38 +P is a good cartridge, but the .357 is a real thumper, a certifiable manstopper. For those looking to obtain that extra edge, and willing to pay the price in terms of increased muzzle blast and recoil, the magnum is the way to go.

One thing I would like to see is the addition of a night sight in the front ramp. As I anticipated, the overhead fluorescent lights at the range tended to wash out the front sight to the point that it was hard to obtain a proper sight picture. That problem would probably be more pronounced in brighter light conditions. Additionally, I can't help but wonder if their Ribber grip, scaled down to fit the CIA, might not help further cushion the 650's stout recoil. Just thinking out loud, Taurus.

FINAL NOTES

With the CIA, Taurus feels that a hole in the M85 line has been filled and the family completed. Taurus now lists 28 different versions of the gun in its inventory, enough to cater to any possible whim or need. Although nothing is ever definite in the ever-changing gun industry, I get the distinct impression that Taurus feels the CIA has eliminated the one gap in its snubnose revolver family and, with the exception of the forthcoming titanium CIA, we probably won't see any more new versions coming down the pike. It's obvious that they're very proud of their newest product. I have to agree. ■

UPCOMING TRAINING EVENTS

JANUARY 2002

Jan 28th - 30th: Chemical Munitions Instructor. This course provides a complete overview of the use of both traditional chemical agent munitions and aerosol devices. Tuition: \$650. Contact: Smith & Wesson Academy, 299 Page Blvd., Springfield, MA 01104; email: swacademy1@aol.com. Website: www.sw-academy.com

Jan 30th - Feb 1st: Less Lethal Instructor. The course will introduce the student to the various less-lethal products suitable for law enforcement use and will also cover the application of bean bags and pepperballs. Tuition: \$875. Contact: Smith & Wesson Academy, 299 Page Blvd., Springfield, MA 01104; email: swacademy1@aol.com. Website: www.sw-academy.com

FEBRUARY

Feb 4th - 8th: Tactical Pistol. This course offers the opportunity to develop and refine basic shooting skills and to concentrate on the dynamic tactical utilization of the pistol for the individual officer. Tuition: \$900 (inc. ammo). Contact: Smith & Wesson Academy, 299 Page Blvd., Springfield, MA 01104; e-mail: swacademy1@aol.com. Website: www.sw-academy.com

Feb 11th - 13th: Concealed Carry Handgun Instructor. Recent trends in techniques for carrying handguns concealed present challenges for the instructor. This course will acquaint the instructor with safe drawing techniques from various popular holster types not normally permitted in a training environment. Tuition: \$550 (inc. ammo). Contact: Smith & Wesson Academy, 299 Page Blvd., Springfield, MA 01104; e-mail: swacademy1@aol.com. Website: www.sw-academy.com

MARCH

Mar 4th - 8th: Pistol Instructor. This course is designed for the firearms instructor involved in the transition from revolver to pistol. Tuition: \$900 (inc. ammo). Contact: Smith & Wesson Academy, 299 Page Blvd., Springfield, MA 01104; email: swacademy1@aol.com. Website: www.sw-academy.com

Mar 11th - 15th: Defensive Tactics Instructor. The PPCT Defensive Tactics Systems is the first subject control system developed through tactical, legal and medical research. It addresses the most common types of resistance officers encounter, allowing the instructor candidate to maximize training time on job-related techniques. Tuition: \$550. Contact: Smith & Wesson Academy, 299 Page Blvd., Springfield, MA 01104; e-mail: swacademy1@aol.com. Website: www.sw-academy.com

Mar 18th - 22nd: Firearms Instructor Update. This course was designed to keep Firearms Instructors up-to-date on today's issues and remain current. S&W Academy instructors are required to attend an Update/Recertification program every three years. Active firearms instructors not certified by the Academy are also encouraged to participate. Tuition: \$875 (inc. ammo). Contact: Smith & Wesson Academy, 299 Page Blvd., Springfield, MA 01104; e-mail: swacademy1@aol.com. Website: www.sw-academy.com

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