

WHEN YOU REALLY KNOW YOUR GUN



The quest for total familiarity—the gun becomes a natural extension of your arm!

By Walt Rauch

GUNFIGHTING

While I was discussing teaching points with another law enforcement firearms instructor, he posed an interesting question: What single item did I find that trainees in firearms classes lack, regardless of their occupations; that is, law enforcement and non-sworn citizens? I realized that I continually see one fundamental skill that needs to be gained—total familiarity with their firearm. A gun handler should be so well acquainted with his handgun that his every action is performed reflexively, not unlike using a fork to eat. The other instructor opined that he has asked



The Wilson Combat KZ-45 (Tactical Carry Pistol).



this question of many instructors and the standard reply is that students should have a better grounding in the shooting fundamentals—sight picture, trigger control, sight alignment and follow-through.

Granted, these are the basics of marksmanship, but the student first needs to acquire this total familiarity, so that he can better focus on the fundamentals and other teaching points he'll get in his formal training, without being distracted by trying to remember just what he's supposed to do with the gun and when.

Gun manipulation and malfunction clearances should require almost no conscious thought. The gun handler should be able to perform regular mechanical operations of his firearm without stopping to say to himself, "Now, what am I supposed to do with this?" As trite as it might seem, the gun should be an extension of the body. I am not saying that the gunhandler should be unconscious of the rules of gun safety and that he not be totally aware of his every action. It's just that all his efforts should be fluid and flowing.

Now, how to learn this deftness and



Bill Bartash shows that the KZ-45 is very controllable.

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GUNFIGHTING, GUNS, GEAR

(Continued from page 45)

sureness of gun handling? Learning on the range is expensive time, both for the student, who could be learning more skills, and for the instructor, who is held back because the student doesn't get the next teaching point while he's tied up learning his gun. The question then is, how and where can these skills be learned safely while not in class?

While in formal class, gun safety is reinforced and gun handling is supervised. Elsewhere, these external controls are missing. You are your own safety officer and you need a safe location. To practice at home, you need an area that replicates the formal range, with a safe backstop and nothing down range. It's all too easy to fall into the trap of just "messing with the gun" and, if you're lucky, "only" shooting the TV set, a lamp or a light switch plate. These are the most common "victims" of negligent discharges in the home, according to my own unofficial survey, so be sure the area is clear of them—after you've ensured that the area is clear of other people and animals. Next, double check your firearm to be sure it's unloaded. Perhaps go so far as to have a spare, dedicated "red" gun (a deactivated and marked training gun).

Now, before we go any further, I realize that finding a secure place to do this will be very difficult. Also, for the first few hours, moving around with the gun, putting it down, then picking it up and safety-checking it again will be awkward, but bear with me. It is worth the trouble!

The goal is to keep the gun in your hand as much as possible for every waking hour, while rigidly following all the firearms safety rules. The gun must be unloaded, your finger must **never** be on the trigger and the muzzle must **never** point at anything you do not wish to destroy. You **MUST NOT** dry fire during this exercise, for dry firing is part of the shooting fundamentals and should be done separately. If you must put the gun down, safety-check it when you pick it back up—*no exceptions*.

Again, this is one of those steps that's the most easy to neglect, sometimes with comic, if not tragic, results. My friend Roger Tucker told the story of how he was visiting a girlfriend at her mother's house. While waiting for her to finish getting ready to go out, he, for reasons best known only to him, pointed his carry gun at the TV and—oops! He said the TV died right quick. Now, Roger was a quick thinker, so he noted the make and model and went right out and bought an identical replacement set. Because it was large, he said he had great difficulty getting it from the store to the house, but he



When the shooter does his part, the Wilson Combat KZ-45 groups regularly and reliably under 2 inches at 25 yards.



The KZ-45 disassembled. The steel frame insert is the heart of this pistol.



Notes KZ-45's large external extractor

thought it was worth it to avoid the embarrassment. He put everything back as he found it and relaxed. When the mother came home, she said nothing and was quite pleasant to him. But later, she told her daughter that, while Roger was quite welcome in the house, he had to leave his gun in the car. Sharp lady!

By the way, while doing this training exercise, be sure to not wear a holster for your handgun or have a sling on any long arm you carry around so that you're not tempted to cheat. The whole idea is that if you carry it long enough, you will learn the gun's balance and will reflexively grasp it correctly. Put the gun down as necessary, but pick it back up as soon as you're through doing whatever requires using both hands. If the task requires only one hand, keep or transfer



The 18-LPI checkering on the front strap and grip panel checkering is comfortable yet ensures control.



The 10-round magazine has a well-thought-out base plate.

the gun to the other hand. If you're right-handed, transfer the gun to your left hand so that you free up your dominant hand.

Now, after performing this drill for a while (you'll know when you've done it enough), put the holster or sling on but don't just begin to wear the gun. Use the sling or the holster to secure the arm when you need your hands for other tasks, and unsling or draw after you're done. You'll see that you get very proficient at drawing and reholstering your handgun. The same goes for the rifle. Try various modes of slinging it—left shoulder, muzzle down; right shoulder, muzzle up and cross-chest carry.

By doing this home drill, you're doing a large part of what you also do at any formal training school. In your home, as on the range, you're holding the gun in one or both hands for extended periods of time. In formal training, you're asked to draw to the ready position, then the exercise is explained and then you do the drill, reholstering or slinging afterward and when you need to top off magazines, get water or use the facilities. And you do this all day.

The "gun walk-around" gives you an excellent sense of the gun's heft and balance and you quickly develop the ability to reflexively control it. Learn this before

Specifications: Wilson Combat KZ-45 (Tactical Carry Pistol)

CALIBER: .45ACP
BARREL: 5 inches
OA LENGTH: 8 5/8 inches
HEIGHT: 5 1/2 inches
WIDTH: 1 5/16 inches
WEIGHT EMPTY: 31 ounces
WEIGHT LOADED: 43 ounces
SIGHTS: #367 NITE-EYES
SIGHT RADIUS: 6 11/16 inches
MAGAZINE CAPACITY: 10 rounds
FINISH: Armor-Tuff polymer finish/stainless, steel on exterior metal surfaces
ACCESSORIES: 2 magazines, #146 nylon pistol rug, instructional video & color manual

paying good money to a school so that you get more out of your formal training, focusing on the instruction and the fundamentals of shooting rather than on gun manipulation.

GUNS

Bill Wilson of Wilson Combat, Inc., has done it again, coming up with another winner, his new KZ-45 (Tactical Carry Pistol). According to the Wilson Combat 2000 Master Catalog, the KZ-45 is the result of over two years of development on two continents. The KZ-45 has three major features: the polymer frame, the large external extractor and the 10-round magazine.

According to the catalog, the polymer frame is a composite of stainless steel and Kevlar-reinforced polymer with raised 18-lines-to-the-inch checkering on the front and on the separate flat polymer mainspring housing. The side panels are pebbled. The frame is narrower than a comparable steel or alloy frame 1911, although the KZ-45 mag holds two rounds more than a 1911 mag. The stainless steel insert is permanently bonded to the polymer shell. Using a steel insert, Wilson is able to hold critical dimensions of the pin holes, frame rails, barrel lockup and feed ramp, which can be maintained through precise machining.

Based on my experience with other polymer-framed guns, shooting the KZ-45 feels as if it were recoiling less thanks to the tendency of polymer to have some flex or "give" to it. Joe Venezia and Bill Bartash both gave this T&E sample a most thorough run! Bill is a top-ranked shooter in International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC), Limited and Unlimited Class, and he "ran the gun" as if he were practicing with his own IPSC Limited Class 1911. Joe ran self-defense speed drills as well as shooting

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(Continued from page 47)

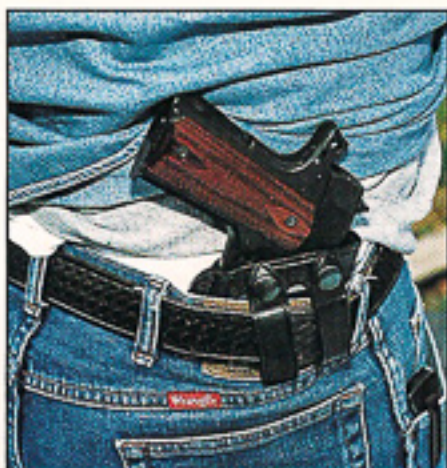
with both his dominant and less-dominant hands, trying to induce malfunctions—to no avail.

I did the accuracy work, which was a bit redundant after all the Wilson 1911s I've shot. The KZ-45 is as accurate as all the rest. If you do your part, the gun shoots into less than 2 inches at 25 yards all day long, and doesn't favor any one .45 load over another. I got excellent groups with all. Some better than others, of course, but since I'm shooting over a gun bag rest and not using a Ransom rest, the shooter certainly influences the results. (I do jerk a shot now and then!)

The 10-round magazine is a steel tube and spring with a polymer follower and an extended and removable polymer base plate for ease of disassembly and more positive mag insertion. The mags retail for \$39.95. (The Wilson Bureaucrat extended 10-round 1911 mag retails for \$31.95.) At first when I examined the new gun, I was disappointed and irritated that it didn't take 1911 mags. On reflection, though, if you're going to design a 1911-based gun from the ground up, so to speak, it's much better to have the legal 10-round limit in a flush-mounted mag.

The last noticeable change from a standard 1911 is the external extractor. Now to say that if John Browning wanted an external extractor on the 1911, he'd have put one there and any change is heresy, well, other John Browning-designed handguns use external extractors. The Colt Model N .25ACP, the Colt Model M in .32ACP and .380ACP and the Baby Browning, to name a few. The external extractor is now used almost exclusively in autopistols, so maybe it is a better idea.

Now, as to the top and back end of the KZ, it's 1911 all the way. The slide has



The Bulman IWB pulls in close to the body, yet allows a full shooting grip.

the Wilson #357 NITE-EYES fixed, windage-adjustable sights, forward and rear diagonal cocking serrations and the #2G HD recoil spring and Shok-Buff to go along with the familiar muzzle bushing. At the back, a Wilson #455B Speed (oval) Hammer mates up with the Wilson #314C sear and #298B High Ride Beavertail and #6BN extended, tactical, single-sided thumb safety.

A long 1911 trigger is used to give a crisp 4.5 pounds on my scale. The stainless match barrel is handfitted and the feed ramp is polished and throated. The mag catch is 1911-common. The metal parts of the gun are finished off in Wilson ARMOR-TUFF, a corrosion-resistant matte-black finish. The stainless steel barrel and the stainless steel insert are not coated, nor is the serial number plate at the top of the right grip panel. The KZ-45 works in the 1911 holsters I tried it in, including the Wilson Covert Companion and the Rapid Response Models. You'll need new mag pouches, though.

All in all, the KZ-45 is an excellent single-action cocked-and-locked, updated and improved 1911 design with a suggested retail of \$995.

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GEAR

Bulman Gunleather (P.O. Box 361, Dept. CH, Newry, PA 16665; phone 814-696-8615, fax 814-695-1464, jholsters@aol.com or www.bulmangunleather.com) is a real find for aficionados of fine leather gear. Joshua Bulman, owner, sole proprietor and all-around worker, has a business slogan "The Pinnacle of Quality, Function and Reliability," and he's right on the money. My friend Joe Venezia and I have been carrying Bulman holsters for a while now. I've been using a Bulman FBS (Full Belt Slide) for a GLOCK, while Joe has a TSA-T (Secret Agent-Thin) for a Government Model 1911, both with single magazine pouches to match. Both setups are quite comfortable. They're hand-molded to the gun, with edges burished, and both have sight tracks. I have Trijicon sights on the GLOCK 22 and Joe has Heinie night sights on many of his own custom-worked 1911s.

Joshua uses a polymer inner welt at the mouth of the holster to keep it open for reholstering. He said he likes the polymer because it will not crimp shut as will steel if you fall on or roll on the holster. I haven't tried this yet, but it can be a problem with some other rigs. Joe is rather particular about inside-the-waist-band holsters. After one war, car and motorcycle accidents and a generally hard, outdoor working life (and some active indoor leisure-time frays), Joe has beaten up his body pretty well, his back in particular. I understand from those of you with bad backs that having this problem really helps get your attention when carrying a serious fighting handgun on or in your pants. Joe has used the rig for two months without complaint, so it's fair to say the Bulman IWB rig passes the test with flying colors.

The TSA-T is thinner than the other holster. The thinness is achieved, according to Joshua, through a special tanning process that he does in-house after receiving the leather from the tannery. I like the FBI-canted outside holster and mag carrier, too. (My back is about the only thing I haven't injured in my travels, so thankfully I can get along with holsters that hurt Joe.) In speaking to Josh, he said he learned his craft by hanging out, visiting, observing, questioning and generally pestering Ken Null in his shop in Hanover, PA, before Ken moved to Georgia. Ken Null is a master holster maker and, after looking at and wearing Bulman leather, I think Joshua paid attention, listened and learned very well. He has a nicely-done catalog with a small but very good line of holsters, mag pouches and belts. ●

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