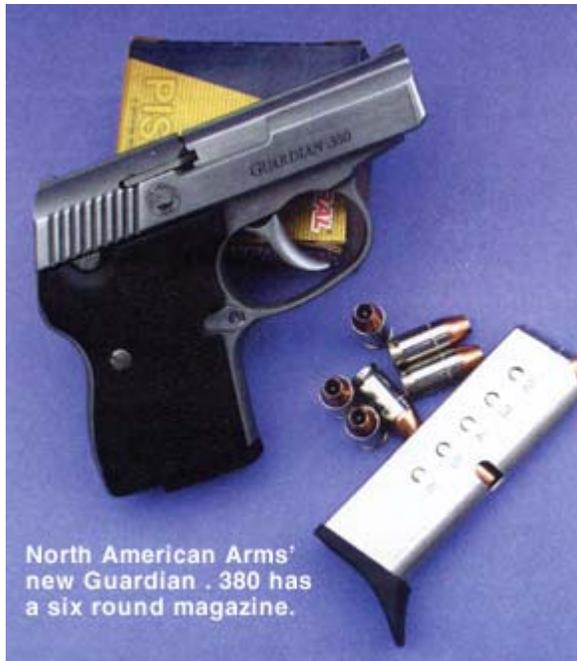




North American Guardian Grows Up

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By Gila Hayes,
Contributing Editor



In 1997 North American Arms, then best known for their .22 caliber mini-revolvers, introduced a pistol that was night-and-day different from the guns for which they had become rightly famous. The .32 ACP Guardian was one of several take-offs on the tiny Seecamp semi-automatic. It was my opinion then that NAA's version was the best of the new breed, with sturdy, nicely machined all-steel slides and frames that were attractive and functional.

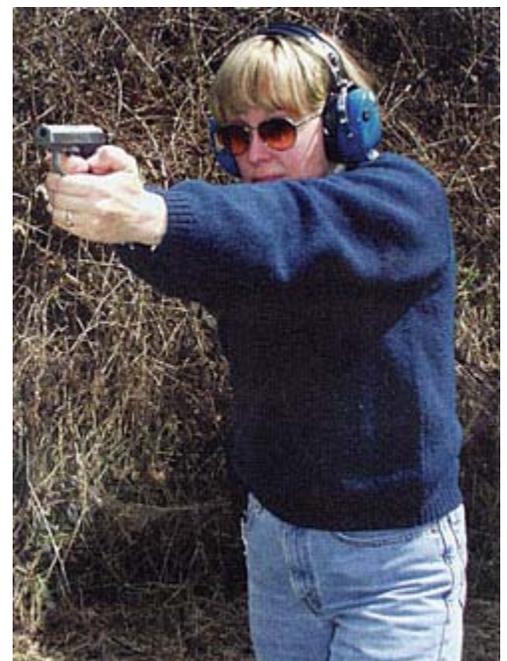
The .32 ACP cartridge is underpowered for the wide-range of threats against which most citizens carry a concealed firearm. Thus, the growth of the Guardian line to include a pocket pistol chambered for the .380 ACP cartridge deserves enthusiastic acclaim. At the January 2001 SHOT Show, the gun industry's yearly trade show, I spoke with Ken Friel, general manager of North American Arms, and all but begged him to get me a sample as quickly as he could.

Friel came through for me last week, writing that "this is the first .380 sent out to a writer. All others are being field tested." I deeply appreciated NAA's attention to our magazine deadlines, as this excellent variation on an already good gun really should be heralded in our New Products edition!

The Larger .380

The .380 ACP cartridge gives us the advantages of slightly more ballistic power. Generally, .380s are loaded with 85 to 90 grain bullets that average velocities of nearly 1000 feet per second, with a few notable examples running even faster. The .32 ACP semi-automatic cartridge is usually available with 60 to 71 grain bullets and average velocities of about 800 feet per second.

Remember that a handgun's power to incapacitate an assailant relies on a partnership of mass (the weight or size of the projectile) and the energy transferred from that bullet via its velocity. While I realize this is an oversimplification, the private citizens making decisions about what defensive gun and ammunition to carry must choose defensive gear based on facts, not commercial promotion!



The .380 Guardian does a reasonable job of absorbing the recoil, thanks to the rubbery Hogue grips.



The new NAA .380's extractor is considerably beefier than that of the .32 version.

With the move to a larger caliber ammunition, the Guardian's dimensions have gotten slightly larger. Measuring my original NAA Guardian .32 against the new .380 Guardian gives the following comparison, shown in the box at the bottom of the page.

Externally, NAA has modified the new .380 by increasing the mass of the slide enclosing the fixed barrel, and rounding the edge of the exposed backstrap, a welcome addition. When I'd received my original NAA .32, I radiused that edge myself - none to professionally, mind you, but enough

that the little gun didn't tear the palm of my hand when firing. NAA picked up on this need and radiused the edge at the factory.

Further hand protection will come from the soft rubber Hogue grip panels that have replaced the hard plastic ones worn by those first .32s. The Hogue grip is rounded at every edge, and has the trademark Hogue pebble texture to increase gripping stability under recoil. The Guardian's vestigial sights remain the same from the .32 to the .380. I have always believed these pocket pistols were prime candidates for addition of laser sights, an idea on which C.C. Manufacturing has capitalized with their "pistol slipper."

Another solution is available at the NAA Custom Shop, which will install sights from Novak, Ashley, IWI and HIVIZ on the Guardians. I would consider the Ashleys with the standard dot front sight if carrying the gun as a primary defense pistol on a daily basis. As a back up to my larger self defense gun, the original sights are less consequential.



Laser sights and pocket guns make a great team. We found this fitting, made by C.C. Manufacturing shown at the NAA booth at the SHOT Show in January.

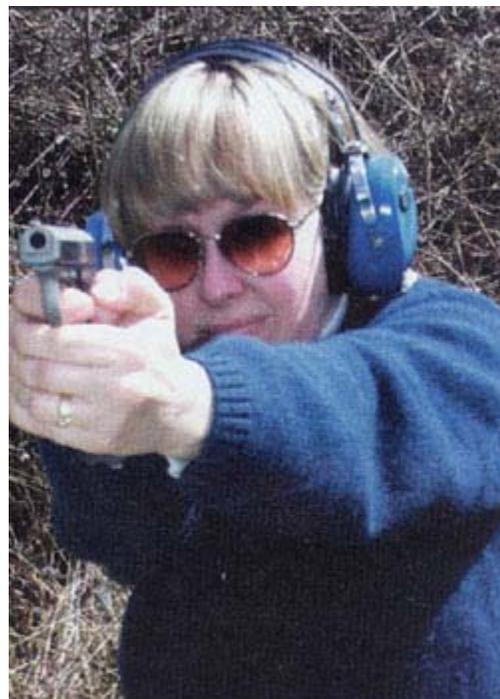
While the .32 Guardian used a flat-based magazine, the .380 is shipped with two magazines with small black plastic base pads and one with a finger extension on the base. These are manufactured for NAA by Mec*Gar. The magazine release, though similarly located, is striated on the newer Guardian, and the take down button is not only larger, but has coarse checkering to ease field-stripping the tiny gun. The extractor is considerably

larger on the .380, though functionally it works the same as the earlier version, as both pistols operate on the blow-back principle.

Both old and new Guardian use a sleek, bobbed hammer and otherwise look quite similar from the exterior. The hammer is reminiscent of Colt's Pony double action only pistol, but the hammer is heavier, and has not yet failed to activate the primer in the course of my testing. On the downside, the hammer is slotted into both the slide and frame in such a way that the grip tang is quite low on the backstrap. During shooting drills, I found myself unconsciously moving the web of my hand above the grip tang, trying to achieve the strongest, straight-back trigger pull possible. Of course, it wasn't comfortable under recoil. When I remembered, I'd move my hand down, even though it exacerbated my struggle with the trigger.

Just for fun I took the .380 Guardian to the falling steel range, where an assortment of 8-inch plates and Pepper Poppers reside. The little gun is surprisingly quick on the Poppers, which at 10 yards require a mere silhouette of the pistol as an aiming reference. At greater distances, taking time to line up the tiny sights, accuracy potential ran about four inches at 15 yards, the far side of practical for so small a gun.

In slow fire shooting for accuracy the stiff trigger is really apparent. From 15 yards, our best group was a 3.81 inch cluster of six shots fired by my husband, Marty Hayes, using Federal Classic Hi-Shok cartridges with a 90 grain bullet. I would have matched his efforts with a half-dozen American Eagle full metal jacket rounds, with five clustered in a 3.86 inch group, but in a fight with the trigger, I put the sixth round so low the group opened to 4.33 inches. With Federal Hydra-Shoks, we had 4.374 and 4.89 inch groups for six shots each.



A strong, two-handed grip helped stabilize the small pistol against the motion of the ten-pound trigger pull.



The .380 NAA Guardian was more than capable of all A-zone hits from 10 yards.

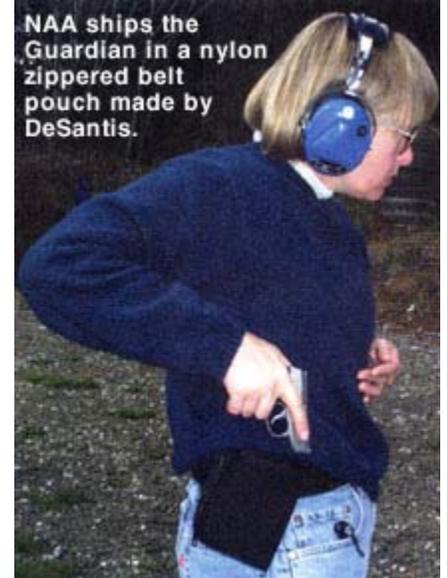
The .380 Guardian's reliability at the range was extremely heartening. I fed it Federal HydraShok and American Eagle cartridges; I ran aluminum-cased Blazer ammo and Federal Hi-Shok hollowpoints through it. They all cycled with no questions asked, leaving me free to concentrate on how the gun felt and the accuracy delivered.

I found no injuriously sharp edges on the frame, which is cast for NAA by another growing name in the pistol business, Kahr Arms. The face of the trigger is thoroughly radiused, and the backstrap, as noted earlier is better rounded. I felt the beginnings of a trigger finger

blister toward the end of testing, but it stems more from the great pressure applied to the trigger at the end of its stroke more than any rough edges.

I am thrilled that North American Arms has brought out the Guardian pistol in a larger caliber! This little jewel makes a great replacement for my previous back up gun. At this point, I have trouble assigning the Guardian as a primary gun, mostly because I don't believe its owner can get through any meaningful training classes-say 15 to 20 hours and 400 to 500 rounds-without wearing out their hand! I can fire the little gun left handed, another criteria for a primary gun, but not with much accuracy beyond five or six yards distance.

These comments should not be construed as critical of the NAA Guardian, but rather help the gun buyer choose it for the right role. Attached to the side-straps of an officer's bullet proof vest, carried in a pocket holster or in the belly-band of the citizen licensed for concealed carry, it will add to the safety of many a legally-armed individual.



NAA ships the Guardian in a nylon zippered belt pouch made by DeSantis.

SPECIFICATIONS GUARDIAN .380

Caliber	.380 ACP
Magazine Capacity	6
Length	4.75"
Height	3.53"
Width	.930"
Weight	18.72 oz.
BarrelLength	2.49"
Rifling	1 turn in 15" RH, 6 groove
Trigger pull	10 lbs. average
Suggested retail	\$449.00
Additional Supplier C.C. Mfg. Co. 818-362-8106 16161 Nordhoff St., #242, Dept. WG North Hills, CA 91343	

Guardian Comparison

	.32 Guardian	.380 Guardian
Weight (with empty magazine)	14oz.	18.72oz.
Overall length	4.324"	4.655"
Height (from magazine base to top of slide)	3.210"	3.698"
Width	.8100"	.9121"
Barrel Length	2.185"	2.49"

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