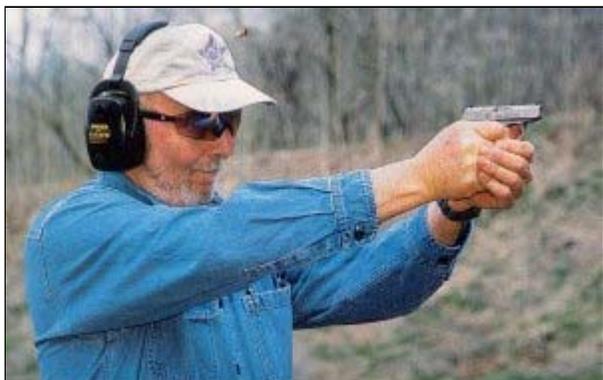




Combat Test - NAA Guardian .32NAA: A Second Look

Ultimate pocket hideaway -- truly an always-gun!
By Walt Rauch



Rapid, aimed fire is doable, as shown here. With an empty in the air, the author is ready for the next shot.

North American Arms (NAA) has done a world-class job of refining the Seecamp double-action pocket automatic design (Seecamp's patent expired a few years back) and now has added its proprietary cartridge, the .32NAA, to the Guardian package. I admit to being biased toward a Seecamp-type gun (with "Seecamp" now being a descriptive term, not unlike Kleenex and Xerox) as I have owned and carried the originals in both .25ACP and .32ACP since they were first marketed. Point of fact, I now interchange between my NAA guns and the originals, only pausing to ensure that the right magazine goes into the right gun.

The beauty of the NAA guns is that they are hard to screw up, for the original Seecamp design is very solid. I've had, and reported, failures to function early on in the testing of the .32 and .380ACP guns, but the teething problems went away within 50 rounds.

Looking back on what I did as opposed to what I thought I was going to do, I find that I haven't warmed up to the bigger .380ACP version, given that it's about the same size yet heavier than my S&W Model 42 .38SPL Airweight that I've been carrying for 30 years. This might well now be subject to change with the new .32NAA in the Guardian platform. Also, I'd have seven rounds (six in the magazine and one chambered) compared to the five rounds I have with my wheelgun, which of course leads to the never-ending debate of semi-auto versus revolver for reliability.

.32NAA Details

Just what is the .32NAA and what is it supposed to do that hasn't already been done by the .32ACP and .380ACP? Simply put, it looks to me to be a worthwhile effort to get more "oomph" out of a .32/.380ACP cartridge platform by using an amalgam of the two. The .32NAA uses a necked-down .380ACP case with a 50-grain .32ACP JHP bullet; the obvious goal being a much higher velocity cartridge that will still work in a very small blow back semi-auto.

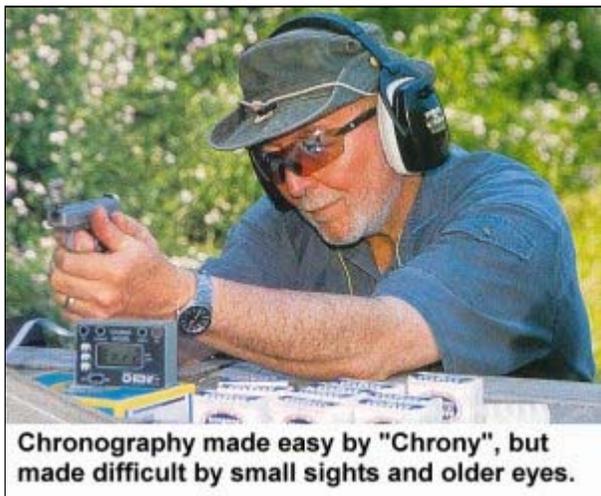
The .32NAA cartridge, according to a North American Arms press release, travels at 1222 feet per second (fps) with 199 foot-pounds of muzzle energy (fpe) from the Guardian's 2.5-inch bar rel. For comparison, according to data in Cartridges of the World, 9th



The NAA action follows the Seecamp design. Note that the dual recoil springs are colored red at the forward end.



Edition, by Frank C. Barnes, the .32ACP has a 60-grain JHP bullet traveling at 970 fps with 125 fpe and the .380ACP is listed with an 85-grain JHP bullet traveling at 1000 fps, with 189 fpe. (I failed to locate any .380ACP round commercially loaded with a 60-grain JHP bullet nor a +P .380 load), so the .32NAA per factory specifications has more velocity and muzzle energy than a .380ACP pending any ballistic data from a .380ACP cartridge loaded with a 60-grain bullet.



Chronography made easy by "Chrony", but made difficult by small sights and older eyes.

When I chronographed the load using a Master Gamma Chronograph from Shooting Chrony, Inc., I was pleasantly surprised to see velocity readings ranging from a low of 1307 fps to a high of 1380 fps, with most registering 1350 and 1351 fps, which should read out at 265 fpe. This is not criticism of the cartridge manufacturer for the variations in velocities, as this was my first time using this chronograph and I know I wasn't consistent in putting rounds over the very ample sensors.

Gun Details

The custom package I asked for didn't help either, since the gun has XS tritium Big Dot sights installed as well as stippling on the front and backstrap. The sights are excellent for simply verifying that you are indeed aiming at the threat, but not much help for precision bulls-eye work. The double-action trigger pull read 11.25 pounds on my scale and, while heavy, the trigger stroke was smooth enough so that I could concentrate on keeping the Big Dot front lined up in the rear sight's wide, shallow V notch.

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Fine stippling on the front and back straps helps when gripping this gun.

As far as my shooting impressions of the .32 NAA, I've come a bit late to the party. Other writers have already covered the new round with comments about the heavy recoil, but I didn't find this to be the case at all. One such sage told me that he didn't think many would want to fire the entire seven-round capacity due to the pain! Uh-huh. The gun's felt recoil doesn't differ much from that which I experience firing .380ACP rounds in the Guardian. It's snappy but tolerable! Both do have one nasty trait in that if you don't grip the gun firmly, the triggerguard comes back and smacks your shooting finger. Of course, you get this "treat" when shooting any of the new ultra-lightweight pocket revolvers with .38S&W +P and .357MAG cartridges.



Two six-round mags are supplied, one with and one without finger rest.

Once I remembered this quirk (by getting rapped yet again), I gripped the gun more firmly and didn't have it happen again through the firing of over 100 rounds. Joe Venezia and John Lysak were on hand, and Joe had the same finger-rapping experience, and quickly remembered how to avoid it as well. John bowed out of the T&E this time, recalling that he had difficulty in getting his large hand and long fingers on the .380ACP Guardian and saw that a repeat performance would not contribute anything to the program, since none of his shots would be indicative of the gun's accuracy.

Joe and I found that .32NAA's accuracy was very good at all reasonable distances. Up close, at five yards, a hand-sized group is easy. At 25 yards, if you work at it you can duplicate this.

The Guardian .32NAA starts out as stainless steel castings from the Pine Tree casting operation of Sturm, Ruger. The castings are then shipped to Kahr Arms, as they have been in the past, to be machined into slides and frames. (A small bit of trivia: The frame is now marked "Kahr Arms.")

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The NAA Guardian has a frame-mounted rather than heel-mounted magazine release and the gun is now easier to take apart and put back together. To disassemble, you must depress and hold in a spring-loaded pin in the top rear of the frame while removing the slide. The Seecamp requires a punch because the pin is recessed. NAA added an external head to the pin so that only thumb pressure is needed to remove the slide. The recoil system is a "spring within a spring," with a NAA-added (over the Seecamp) mini guide rod, a short, flat-headed pin that goes into the front (it's red colored, so you know) of the dual springs. This is a big help when you're trying to "catch" the springs with the very shallow forward edge of the slide as you pull back both to reassemble. This whole procedure is amply described in the accompanying instruction manual.

For the better, NAA eliminated one feature of the Seecamp, a magazine safety. With the Seecamp, the gun won't fire with the magazine removed, an unnecessary and potentially lethal feature. After all, with any carry gun, the magazine release can be accidentally depressed, releasing the magazine. Without this "safety" feature, you can still fire the chambered round.

Putting the familiar .32ACP and larger .32NAA/.380ACP Guardian pistols side by side is the best way to note similarities and differences. Yes, the .32NAA is bigger with a heavier, wider slide and taller frame. The new NAA gun also has an improved extractor, now shorter in length and tensioned by a spring-loaded plunger for more consistent positive tension.



XS sights with tritium inserts help when doing "poke and hope" shooting.



The external "takedown" button makes disassembly easy.



.380ACP (right) and .32NAA (left)

The Hogue-manufactured, pebbled- black-composite, two-piece grips first used on the .32ACP have been retained for the .32NAA and each panel is held to the frame with one black screw. Two supplied magazines hold six rounds each and have five numbered (2 to 6) witness holes on both sides of the magazine body. One has a flat plastic removable base pad and the other a finger hook-style plate for additional purchase on the gun.

The Guardian continues to be supplied with a very nice DeSantis black nylon zippered and lockable belt pouch with clip. You can carry the pouch in your hand or clip it to your person, and it will probably be mistaken for one of the innumerable hand-operated communicators that are so dear to so many. The pouch has a compartmented elastic band to hold the gun as well as the spare magazine, so a fast opening doesn't spill gun and magazine onto the ground, assuming you put everything in right-side-up!

Because the .32NAA chambering necessitates a bigger gun, you get pluses and minuses. The plus is that there is more gripping area and it's easier to control. The downside, of course, is that the gun is a bit harder to hide for deep-cover use, although it is still very small in comparison to other semi-

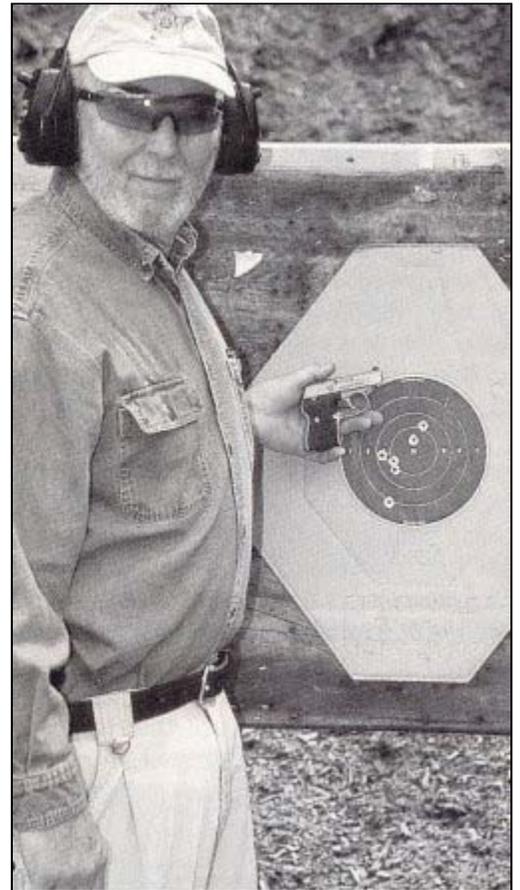
autos so chambered. NAA sent me an Aker pocket holster and a DeSantis ankle rig, and both did their intended jobs.

Final Notes

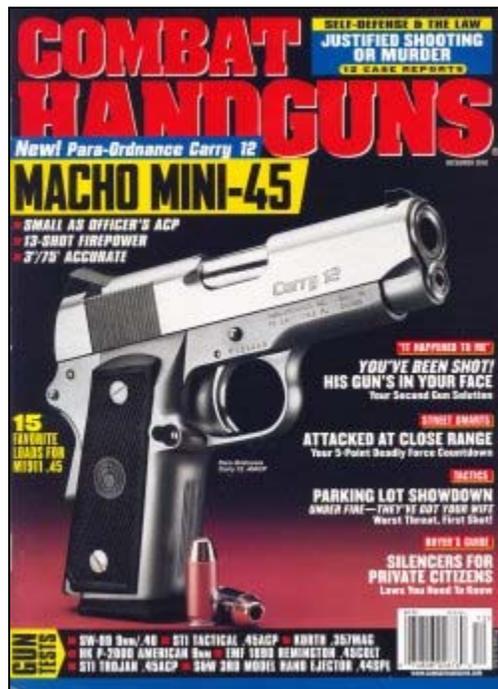
As to the caliber, the .32NAA on paper and in downrange effect on the backstop, looks to be a great step up from the .32 and .380ACP. Is it enough to be viewed as a primary self-defense caliber? Well, no one wants to leak! Especially by you putting holes in them! The advantage of a small gun is that you will more likely have it with you all the time and be able to at least offer a defense. For most, the carry package is probably more important than the caliber, although all things being equal, bigger/more power is bet ter, if you can hit with it. The Guardian is simply a "just-in-case" gun-every one should have one, just in case.

Specifications: Two NAA Guardians

Caliber:	.32ACP	.32NAA
Barrel:	2.19 inches	2.49 inches
OA Length:	4.36 inches	4.75 inches
Width:	.85 of an inch	.93 of an inch
Height:	3.23 inches	3.53 inches
Weight:	13.5 ounces	18.7 ounces



Six shots quick at five yards! Good to go anyway you look at it!!



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