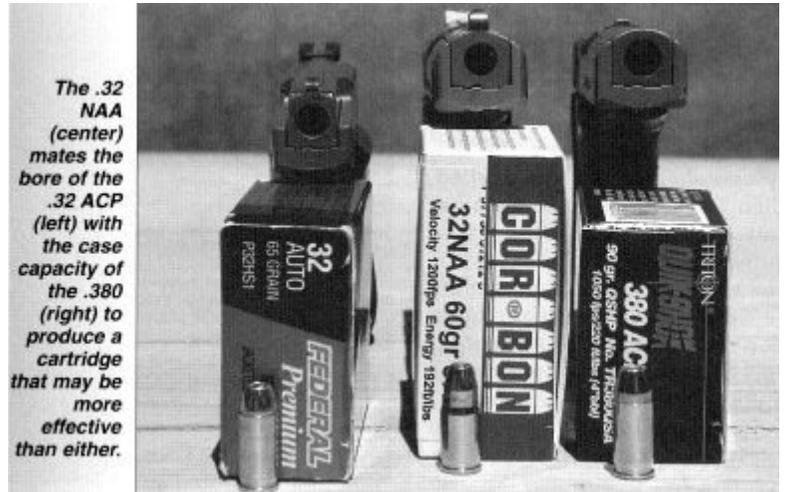


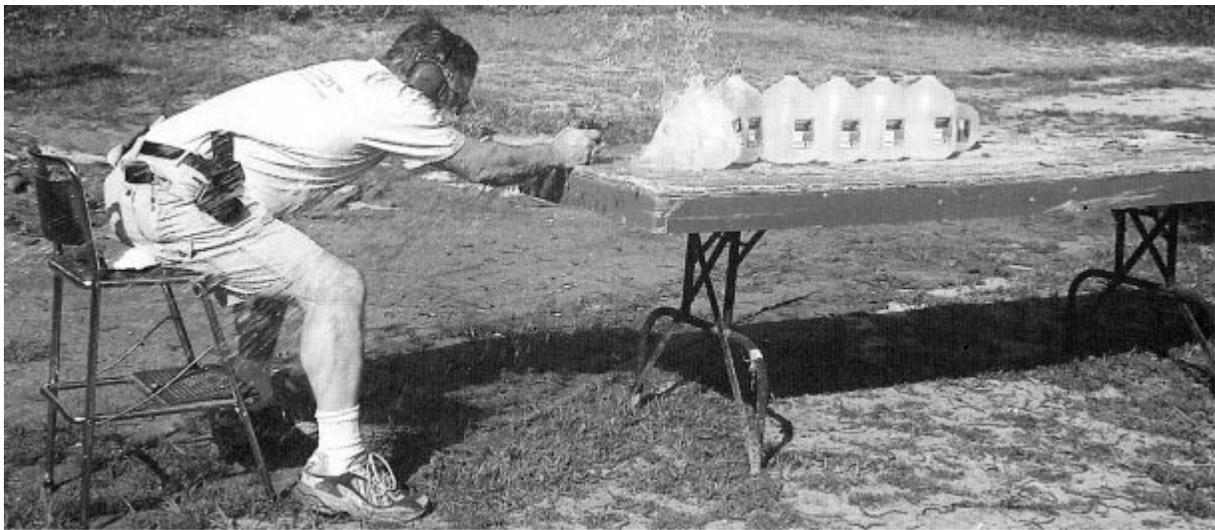
# North American Arms introduces an exciting new caliber for the Guardian pistols. *By D.K. Pridgen*

Bottleneck: "a delay caused when one part of a process or activity is slower than the others and so hinders overall progress; a junction or a narrow section of a road that slows traffic or causes traffic jams." Sounds like a bottleneck must be a bad thing-but is it? Care to take a guess at the pistol cartridge design making the biggest boom in the handgun world? If you've kept your finger on the pulse of American police, you might have a good idea. Causing a stir among law enforcement is the bottleneck .357 SIG! Civilian shooters usually take a big cue from them, so it's showing quite a growth there as well.

And why not? The .357 SIG is reputed to pack all the effectiveness of the legendary 125-grain .357 Magnum into a compact pistol cartridge. Accompanying effectiveness is the higher capacity and increased controllability found in pistols. Into the mixture add the increased reliability from the bottleneck profile, and one can see why the .357 SIG is catching on fast.



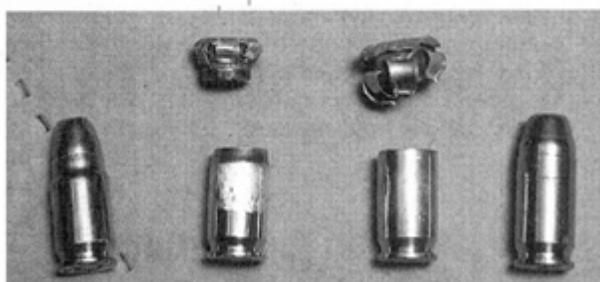
The .32 NAA (center) mates the bore of the .32 ACP (left) with the case capacity of the .380 (right) to produce a cartridge that may be more effective than either.



Pridgen gets a good drenching as he fires the hot .32 NAA into water jugs to test bullet performance and penetration.



The water jug hit by the .32 NAA (left) shows considerably more damage than the one hit by the .380 ACP (right).



Both the 60-grain Hornady XTP bullet used in the .32 NAA (left) and the .380 ACP show good expansion after being fired into water. The author has found that expansion is about 7 percent greater in water than ballistic gelatin.

So fast, in fact, that other bottlenecks are on the horizon, and all of these were predated by the wildcat .38/45. My introduction to this cartridge was probably 20 years ago, finding the empty cases scattered around the shooting range. (I was always looking for .45 ACP cases to bolster my meager supply.) My first thought was "What a waste of a good .45 case!" And, yet, the .38/45 filled a need many bull's eye shooters had, despite never achieving any great commercial success.

At the 2002 SHOT Show I found CorBon, famed for high-performance handgun ammo, had read the tea leaves, throwing their not insignificant weight behind the .400 CorBon, a .45 ACP case with a .40 caliber bullet riding atop. Rounding another corner at the show, I found yet another company choosing the bottleneck as the next way to go-North American Arms!

Makers of those 22 rimfire minirevolvers, NAA made a splash turning out their diminutive .32 ACP Guardian pistols a few years ago. They followed with a slightly enlarged version wrapped around the .380 ACP. So what's a company that pulled off these coups doing, for a follow-up? That's just what I asked Ken Friel. He palmed a small bottlenecked round from the display case, held it out and replied, "When you've done what we have, about the only thing left is to improve the cartridge."

Excluding the remote possibility of a 9mm Luger Guardian, upon which Ken did not comment, it seems he was correct. (Considering the minimal dimensional changes required, wouldn't that be an impressive pocket warmer?!)

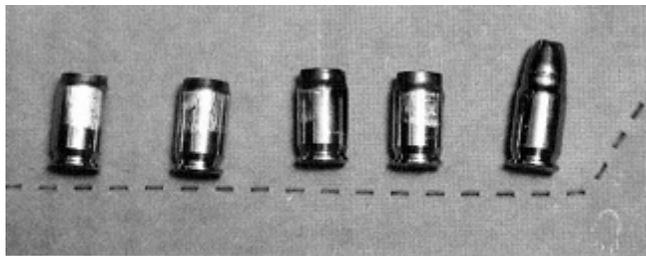
Ken is a fan of the .357 SIG; so necking down the cartridges in their Guardians just seemed a natural. And, yes, I did say "cartridges." NAA will be offering both .32 ACPs necked down to .25 and .380s necked down to .32. First out of the starting gate was the .32/380, named the .32 NAA, using a 60grain bullet. However, by the time you read this, the .25/.32 bottleneck-devised by J .B. Wood and described by him in the June 2002 GUN WORLD~should be available.



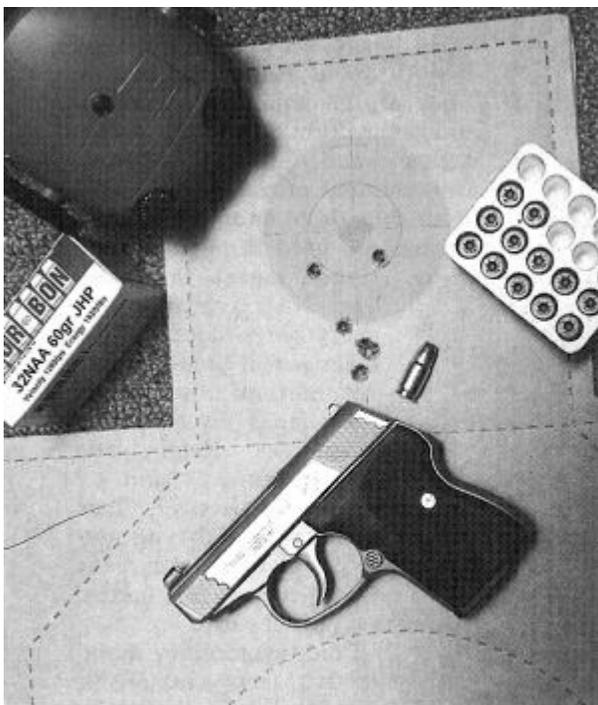
The bottleneck case shape of the .32 NAA combines with the North American Arms pistol's almost straight feed into the barrel to ensure very reliable feeding.



As a safety measure, this pistol comes with a brass lock and a trigger block that rides behind the trigger.



Recovery of fired cases revealed a wide range of case neck shapes. On some the neck looks almost eliminated.



Shooting as fast as he could re-acquire the sights, Pridgen shot this tight group on a Birchwood Casey Shoot-N-C dot on an IPSC target at 15 feet.

In the creation of their bottlenecks, NAA enlisted some industry notables-CorBon, Hornady and Starline. CorBon will be doing the loading and, along with NAA, offering the ammunition. Hornady's XTP bullets' are famous for deep penetration. Starline, known for excellent brass, is providing the bottleneck cases. The first issue of ammunition bears the Starline headstamp; from that point on it will wear NAA's.

Those who have found NAA's Guardians to be first-rate performers need not worry about this newest iteration. NAA did nothing that should affect the Guardian's stellar performance. The only significant difference is the chambering.

The ammunition for the pistol NAA supplied did not arrive until a week later, giving me time to examine the Guardian. A comparison to the .380 Guardian that has taken up residence in my pocket showed only cosmetic differences. The .32 NAA pistol carried tritium Express Sights (AD's new name) Standard Dot sights; mine uses NAA's rendition of the Guttersnipe. Also, the .32 NAA's slide had been customized with snakeskin scallops for fore and aft cocking serrations

Grips were the same: pebbled Hogue offerings. The smooth trigger is wide enough to allow a reasonable range session with no finger abuse and rides in a trigger guard with ample room for all but sausage finger

The hammer lies flush with the rear of the slide until the trigger stroke runs it back. Guardians are, by the way, true double-action pistols that permit a second hammer strike without the slide cycling, should the need arise. (A nice touch, since the instances where a pistol this size is employed will not allow for a "tap, rack" clearance.) No external safety is employed, but NAA offers the Taurus Security System on selected models.

This brings us to the interesting history about NAA's .380 pistols. They are an amalgam of firearm industry efforts. Kahr Arms makes slides and frames, Taurus International provides small parts from their MIM processing, Wolff springs are used throughout, and Hogue makes the grips. The NAA craftsmen fit everything together and make sure it goes boom. Weight of the empty Guardian is just at 1 pound 3 ounces. Height and length run 3.71 and 4.7 inches, respectively. Trim (0.93-inch) and snag free, any pistol from the Guardian line is a natural for pocket carry.

I did my accuracy shooting at 21 feet—a reasonable distance for diminutive pistols. With an average of 2.87 inches, I'd say the new round is not lacking in accuracy. The velocity from the .32 NAA Guardian's 2.5-inch barrel was 1,245 fps only 15 less than Cor-Bon's posted speed. This is an impressive velocity for a .32, being approximately 250 fps greater than a 60-grain .32 ACP hollowpoint from a 4-inch barrel.

Of course, the Guardian was never intended for use from a bench. It's meant for emergencies sans any support but hands. I tried a couple of rapid-fire strings on an IDPA target 15 feet down range. With the Express sights to guide me (quite easily acquired!), I was able to rapid fire a magazine full into the head zone. Just for fun, I backed off to 15 yards and fired a magazine full at a pepper popper. My Dillon HPI electronic muffs picked up a satisfying "ding" a little more than half the time. A little more trigger time would be sure to raise that.

Recoil can be an important factor when choosing a pocket pistol. While the .380, even in such a small package has never caused too many complaints, I wondered about the hotter bottleneck. I elicited the opinion of several other shooters, and all agreed the difference was noticeable but minimal.



Every NAA Guardian comes with a DeSantis carry pouch that looks innocuous zipped up but opens to reveal the holstered pistol and an extra magazine.

What about bullet performance? With volunteers to be shot scarce and no ballistic gelatin, I fired rounds into water to observe expansion. Please, no letters! I acknowledge that water is not the same as flesh or gelatin. However, I did a lengthy study once, comparing bullets performance from short-barreled pistols in water and ballistic gelatin. Two things came from this study: If a bullet does not expand in water, it certainly will not in gelatin. Water exaggerates the expansion by varying degree depending on bullet construction, but the greatest difference I observed was 7 percent.

As a rough estimate of penetration and expansion I shot plastic jugs of water. CorBon's 90-grain Hornady XTP bullet from NAA's .380 Guardian measured 0.52-inch when fished from the water and still weighed 90 grains. The .32 NAA, with its 60-grain XTP blossomed to 0.41-inch, and finished up weighing 56.2 grains. All of the .32 Hornady XTP's petals were left in the first jug. Both loads perforated two II-inch wide jugs and ended up in a third. Crude data, to be sure, but there for your examination!

One more tidbit I garnered from this test: The .380 ACP caused minor rupturing of the first jug, with minimal splash back on the shooter. When I touched off the .32 NAA, though, I knew things had changed. Jug one split apart impressively, and I received an instantaneous bath!

It was during this phase of the evaluation that the .32 NAA faltered a bit. Twice in almost 100 rounds the .32 bullet caught on the feed ramp and was pushed back in the case. CorBon told me one run of the .32 NAA had used bullets without cannelures. (Subsequent runs used cannelured bullets.) CorBon's testing found no problems with the initial loads, but Terry Murbach of CorBon said my experience sounded as though the absence of the cannelure was the culprit.

After about 50 dry firings and 25 live firings, the MIM trigger broke where it connected to the drawbar. I did emergency surgery on the tailgate of my pickup, and swapped in the trigger from my .380 to complete the testing. NAA shot me a new trigger, which I installed and began testing. I'm happy to report that after 150 dry fires and 30 rounds fired, it's still perking!

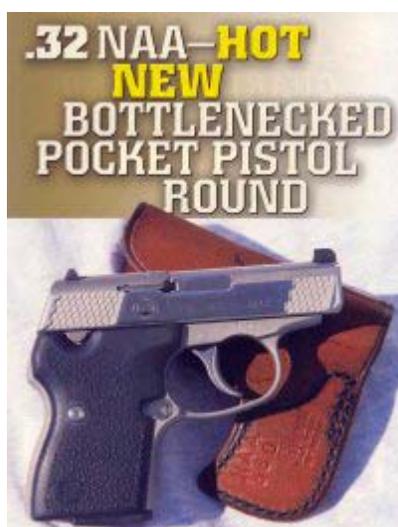
No pocket pistol article would be complete without a mention of carrying it! Along with the Guardian line, NAA offer a plethora of holsters, from a number of industry big names. With each Guardian they include a DeSantis' ballistic nylon zippered pouch. The interior has two elastic pockets for pistol and a spare magazine. A metal clip attaches the innocuous looking pouch to belt or pants much like a holder for any of the abundant palm sized PDAs on the market today. It should pass most observers' inspection easily. .

I asked custom holster maker Lou Alessi to send one of his Ruffout pocket holsters. The Ruffout holds the Guardian perfectly oriented in pant pockets. Crafted from a single piece of thin leather, the thin Ruffout ends up being rigid, to ensure the pistol snicks free during the draw. A rear tab, contoured to the body, allows one to begin pushing the holster off during the draw, to complete separation of pistol and holster, Depending on the snugness of one's pants, the Ruffout masks the outline of the pistol quite nicely. However, if a little more subterfuge is required, slip a handkerchief between the holster and pocket exterior.



Small but comforting, the .32 NAA Guardian slipped into the Alessi Ruffout holster. Together they nestled comfortably and unnoticeable in the author's pocket.

Good to carry, good to shoot, and, based on my limited testing, I'd expect the .32 NAA to be good at performing. The bottom line is: The Guardian, chambered for .32 NAA and made with all the quality one expects from North American Arms, should be good to go anywhere ultra-discrete protection is needed!



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We welcome comments: [webmaster@naaminis.com](mailto:webmaster@naaminis.com)

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