

DEFENSIVE HANDGUNS

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North
American
Arms

Guardian Custom



North American Arms now offers factory custom features for their little pocket autos, plus a new high-velocity caliber, the .32 NAA. Very similar to the "cult classic" Seecamp, the North American Arms Guardian pistol began life as a vest-pocket size gun - the size of some .25 autos-but chambered for the more potent .32 ACP round. Innovations at Ruger's Pine Tree Casting facility in New Hampshire allowed frames and slides to be produced in this size that would handle a more powerful round, and soon the Guardian was available in the distinctly more potent .380 ACP.

The Guardian .380 was (and remains) an appealing little gun. The .380 ACP round, however, leaves something to desired when fired from a 2-1/2 inch barrel. The 85-grain Winchester Silvertip and 90-grain Federal Hydra-Shok, each rated at 1,000 feet per second from a 4-inch barrel, have been known to drop in velocity down to around 800 f.p.s. when fired from a 2-1/2 inch barrel.

Enter the Guardian .32 NAA, a virtually identical gun chambered for the new .32 NAA cartridge - a .380 ACP case necked down to .32 caliber. The first (and currently the only) ammo manufacturer to load .32 NAA is Cor-Bon.

Available loads include a defensive round (60-grain JHP at 1,200 f.p.s.) and a 71-grain FMJ practice load at a lower velocity, as well as a 55-grain Glaser Safety Slug at 1,250 f.p.s. (not tested).

NAA has started offering "factory custom" options and packages on their pistols. For this test we started with a standard .32 NAA Guardian, then added a variety of custom options, including Novak fixed sights with Trijicon tritium inserts (\$199), a high-polish finish on the barrel and slide (\$75), scalloped front and rear slide serrations (\$120), stippling on the front and back straps and trigger guard (\$75), and an action hone. The guns can even be ordered with the customer's initials as the serial number.



The author's custom-ordered .32 NAA Guardian sitting behind a standard, "no-frills" .32 NAA Guardian. Both are effective close-quarters companions.

The Pistol

OUR CUSTOM GUARDIAN .32 NAA came out of the box with an attractive finish, and the scalloping instead of grooves on the slide looked striking. As has already been proven by Ed Brown on his semi-custom 1911 s, and by the Smith & Wesson Performance Center on a variety of pistols, the scallops are very effective for manipulation as well. Here, they came both front and back, You can argue whether or not forward slide grooves should be used on any pistol, in that they bring the hand close to the "business end," but on this gun the front serrations serve little purpose, as the leverage on the slide is gained from the back.

The grip-frame stippling provides more positive handling in a pistol so small you can only get one whole finger around it when the flat-bottom magazine is inserted, and two with the finger-extension mag in place. One magazine of each type is provided, and each holds six cartridges.

The internal geometry of this 6+ 1 double-action-only, external-hammer pistol is such that it comes with a heavy trigger pull. The custom action job smoothed that out nicely and made precision hits easier at close range, but the pull was still over twelve pounds. On a pistol this small, that seems like more than it is. The male testers found the trigger pull fatiguing, and both female testers (one tall, one petite, both with proportional size hands) found it too heavy.

Similarly, due to the strong, captive, double recoil spring, the slide is not easy to retract. Contrary to the popular stereotype of vest-pocket pistols being "ladies' guns," the Guardian .32 NAA needs strong hands to operate efficiently.

With the finger-extension magazine in place, the average male hand can comfortably grasp the Guardian's front strap with two fingers. Yes, this is a compact pistol!



The Novak sights were a huge improvement over the standard machined sights, and the Trijicon tritium inserts make sense on any defensive pistol. Out of the box the gun shot distinctly to the right, but the Novak rear could be driven a bit leftward in its dovetail to solve the problem. The special order serial number is a much-appreciated option. It adds to pride of ownership, and is a particularly nice idea if the gun is to be a gift to someone you care about.

Shooting the .32 NAA

DESPITE ITS conveniently small size, this is a solid little gun that weighs almost 19 ounces unloaded. That, plus its soft Hogue grips, made recoil no problem at all for the shooters who tested it.

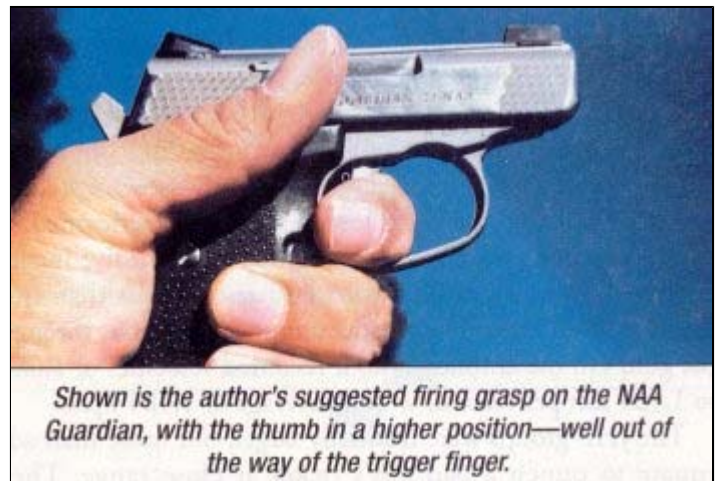
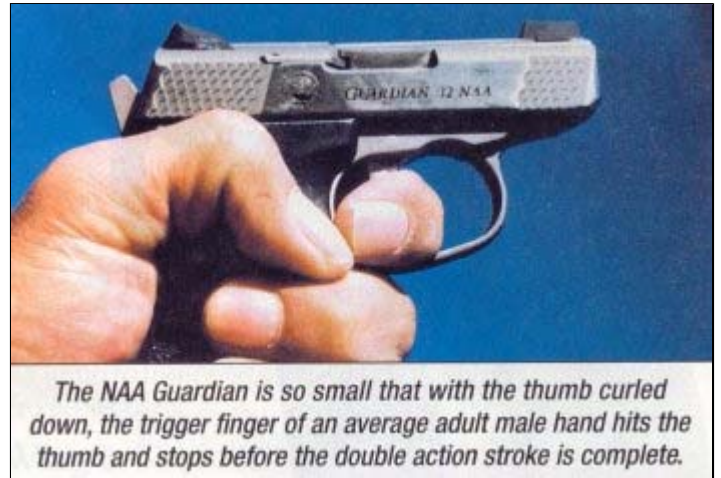
The trigger reach is very short, and we found that in average size adult male hands, it was possible to block the trigger finger with your own thumb if the latter digit were curled down. A "high thumb" or "straight thumb" hold solved that concern.

No matter which caliber you choose, these are not 25-yard pistols. Most reviewers have resorted to testing them at seven yards and closer, which is where such "hideout" guns are intended to be employed anyway. Even so, we opted to test the Guardian at 25 yards just to see how it performed.

The practice ammo gave a best group of about five inches for five shots at 25 yards. That translates into less than two inches at seven yards. The practice ammo ran perfectly through the gun. On the chronograph, it recorded velocities of 1,087 to 1,131 feet per second, with an average of 1,104 f.p.s.

The JHP groups were distinctly larger, but more than adequate to punch a bad guy's ticket at close range. They chronographed from 1,241 to over 1,300 feet per second, and a bright muzzle flash was visible even in daylight. Cratering of the primers, indicating high pressure, was noted. Also, with this ammo, we had the occasional malfunction. The spent case from the last shot would hang up lengthwise in the ejection port, an indication that the slide was moving very rapidly and closing on the spent case before it has had time to clear. This type of jam is easily cleared by turning the pistol upside down and slightly retracting the slide.

Three other published tests of the Guardian .32 NAA (including one by Bill Battles in the October/November issue On Target) showed 100% reliability with the JHP ammo, and given that these rounds were averaging well over



the factory spec of 1,200 f.p.s., it may be that we simply wound up with a particularly hot batch.

Guardian's Pedigree

THOSE CASTINGS from Ruger's Pine Tree facility go to Kahr Arms, which shapes them into the slides and frames of the Guardian pistols, and thence to NAA for finish and assembly. Three respected armsmakers are involved. The Guardian carries a good, pedigree.

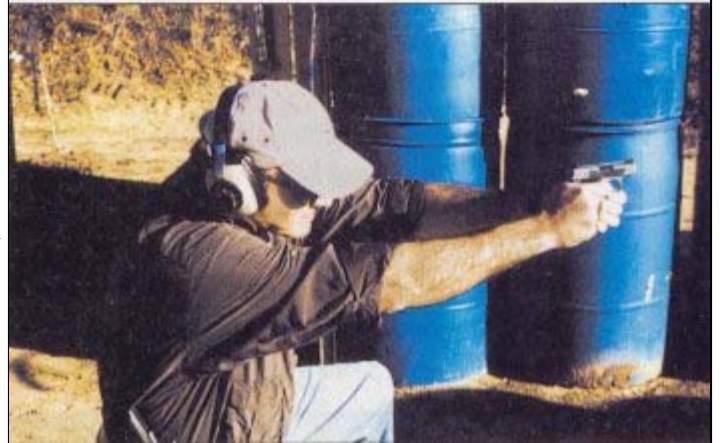
As promising as the .32 NAA seems to be, no felon has yet been shot with one, so its actual performance remains an unknown quantity. Winchester may soon come on line with .32 NAA ammo, which will help popularize the round. The custom work? The scalloping on the slide is great. The trigger job was nice. The Novak sights are great, and their Trijicon inserts - the "gold standard" of night sights - expand the gun's defensive potential. The frame stippling not only looks cool, but also aids in controllability. The Guardian comes in a neat little DeSantis fabric case that looks like a Daytimer and clips onto belt or waistband. North American Arms also offers a series of very functional holsters, including a little pocket rig, my personal favorite.

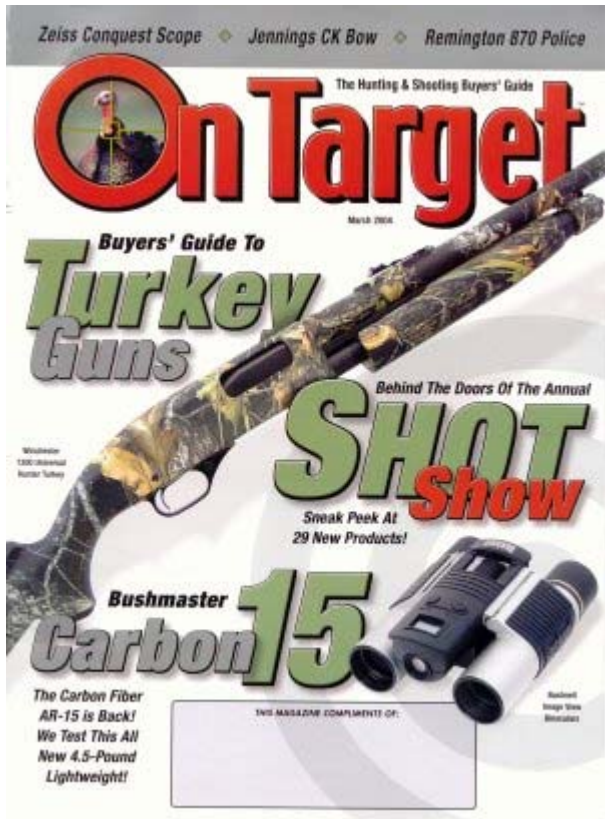
Options are good to have. With both the .32 NAA cartridge and all of the factory custom work, North American Arms has given us m9re. See the Guardian .32 NAA at your gun shop (standard gun \$449), or contact North American Arms, 2150 S. 950 E., Provo, UT 84606; Tel.: (800) 821-5783; Fax: (801) 374~9998; Web: www.naaminis.com

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Above: At five yards, the distance the gun was designed for, the Guardian's groups were perfectly adequate. Below: Controllability of the .32 NAA is shown here with Steve Sager still on target and a spent casing just above the ejection port.





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