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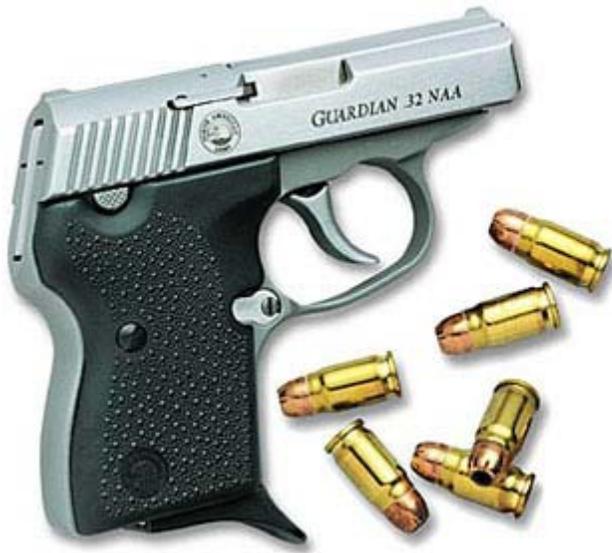
Quicksilver and Lightning: North American Arms with Their .32 NAA Guardian has Changed Concealed Carry Forever!

Daniel Erin

The "tectonic plates" of enough power vs. deep conceal-ability will continue to grind until equilibrium is reached. For most people that is somewhere between .380 ACP and .38 spl. /9 mm. Luger.

If you carry a concealed firearm (CCW), your quest is to never be "made" or discovered. Rule #1 is never being known to have a gun. Rule #2 is never being known to NOT have a gun. Both scenarios could make you a target! The professional wants their back-up to be effective.

Certainly, never show and tell, but don't let your blunderbuss give you away either. You want this deep gun to be as small as possible--all-day comfortable--and you shouldn't have to worry that your coat is open and exposing your gun. Yet, you need enough power to justify having the gun in the first place.



Remember, we're not going into combat here, nor are we SWAT raiding a drug den (give me a 1911 .45 ACP please). Rather, even with a much slower draw and fire time, we are putting a little peace of mind in our daily accouterment; a tool for today's foibles, as normal as your watch, cell phone or pen knife. Count it just good haberdashery or the concerned citizen's antacid.

This is not a plinker, nor a target gun, per se. This is a "corner gun," for when you are in a corner, when the chips are down and there is no way out. Perhaps a "crazy" is baseball-bat-upset about being denied his permit, and you are on the commission, behind the dais, trapped. I have seen a man pick up a wooden podium over his head for being ruled out of order. You fill in the blanks.

The .25 ACP is regarded as just too weak (a .22 is probably preferable to the .25). The .32 ACP is better, and so nice in the new little pocket autos that "hide in plain sight" right in the palm of your hand. However, the .32 is considered just a little anemic, even though carried by police in Europe for years. Let's say that now we're getting close.

The .38 Special in a compact revolver is good--but it is just a bit bulky. The 9 mm is usually in a package that is necessarily a little larger and heavier. Remember, recoil does factor into the equation as size and weight diminish, and today's metallurgy and polymers allow astounding miniaturization. We are talking ultra-compact here.

Enter North American Arms (NAA 2150 S. 950 East, Provo, UT 84606 / 800-821-5783). Innovative thinking, modern materials, simple rugged design and the credo of minimal-yet-effective carry guns all have deposited this little company squarely over the very spot that was polished by those grinding tectonic plates above.

Changing everything is their Guardian pistol, and the totally new proprietary cartridge, the .32 NAA, which is a .380 case-necked down to .32 caliber (.32/.380). I invite you to their website to explore their marvelous little semi-auto platform (naaminis.com/32naa.html). Is it magic? I don't believe in magic myself, but just like in poker, chance favors the prepared.

Necking down a pistol cartridge is not new, such as the old .30 Luger, but has recently garnered new vogue. The .357 Sig. and 400 Cor-Bon have found favor today, and the practice does have a few advantages, such as improved feeding in semi-autos, and perhaps superior internal burning characteristics. North American Arms, by the way, has also necked the .32 ACP case down to .25 caliber (.25 NAA) with similar results.

I asked Wes, the treasurer of our gun club, to borrow his chronograph so I could time these hot little pepper-poppers. I told him that Ken Friel (head guru at North American Arms) had sent me one of the new .32 NAA semi-auto Guardians to wring out and report on. He laughed at me!

I had originally asked for one in .380 ACP, but Ken at North American said these, and even the .32 ACP's, were seriously backlogged (read 700 guns), but he could send me the new .32 NAA. "Oh, okay! Ha, ha, what luck," I thought.

It seems that North American Arms is quite industry-minded, and even for a small company, they donate like a big company. Our treasurer had me this time; he had special serial #1000 of the same gun, in the new cartridge (.32 NAA); this was one of five guns that North American Arms had donated to our chapter of the "Friends of the NRA" for auction. Ken also laughed and told me to say hello to Wes. Alright, enough laughs, now give me the chrony, Wes!

I've known Ken Friel and North American Arms for some time, as I have owned their tiny five shot .22 revolver and their .32 ACP Guardian for years. I always wanted to write about this realm of ultra compact carry, and to compare the alternatives, and I assure you I will own this little .32 NAA powerhouse too, after shooting it.

When Ken said he was shipping me the Guardian with 90 rounds of both 60 gr. hollow point and 71 gr. metal jacket ammo, his comment was, "THIS GUN WILL ROCK YOU!" Wes said, "Yep, shoots fire 5 feet." I thought hmmm, a .44 mag. is not all that bad, what could this little bottle-neck cartridge be like, even in its minimal pistol. I promptly took it out and shot a couple of rounds into a tree. Let me say that anybody can handle the sharp, but manageable, recoil and report. You need to hold onto this baby, but the "rock you" comes when you learn what the ballistics are, not from the kick. By the way, those two rounds grouped into one inch at 12 feet.

A couple of years ago I had a conversation with a tech at NAA, arguing that I favored the full metal jacket in .32 ACP. I maintained that shooting through an overcoat, suit coat and sweater, etc. required penetration. He acknowledged this as proper thinking, but that it was still debatable. If you go to the website (naaminis.com/prodrevw.html), you can see the .32 NAA (.32/.380) take a huge hog, as well as a ballistic gelatin cross-section that indicates 8.5 inches of expanded (sweet-potato shaped) penetration from the 60 grain hollow-point. The Hornady bullet mushroomed perfectly, and retained virtually 100% of its weight. I think the .32 hollow point has finally come "into its own" with the .32 NAA, IN SPADES! This little proprietary round produces 200 ft./lbs. of energy, more than its parent (.380 ACP), and just under that of a 9 mm, but in a smaller, lighter package and with LESS RECOIL! This is possible due to 1221 feet per second (fps) from its two inch barrel (1400 plus from a 4 inch test barrel), yet it will fit anywhere you want to hide it, and I mean anywhere. If that isn't magic--well go figure!

The chronograph showed an average of 1297 fps from the 60 gr. hollow points, and 1073 fps from the 71 gr. metal jackets. This is refreshingly well in excess of the advertised velocity. The extreme spread was about 10% for each load at 129 and 131 fps. Both loads wanted to go into 3 inches at 7 yards, and 5 inches at 12 yards. My original two shot group of 2 inches into the tree, earlier, was betrayed only by a few fliers throughout the entire accuracy shooting, which I believe was caused by the bench itself. Shooting off-hand allowed a much more natural point and shoot movement through the long trigger pull. Accuracy like this, however, is well within minute-of-attacker, anyway.

I used to carrying either my mini .22 revolver or my .32 ACP almost every day; by far more than any other gun. They would hide easily, were never "made," and I accepted their compromise in power for the trade-off of having one of them with me, when I probably would not have carried a larger gun. Now, with the .32 NAA, I don't feel any compromise at all. The power really is there! This is a first class company. They are always there to answer when I've called. The guns are solid, no-rattle-tight, all stainless steel beauties that are made to last. No polymer, no delrin, just good American stainless steel, and still only 19 ounces. I must also say that the creative juices didn't stop with their guns; these guys are gadget-geeks, too. They have more accessories and gizmos for these little pistols than I have ever seen before. How about a belt-buckle holster? Once I asked Ken if he ever thought of making a neck lanyard for their little .22 revolver. His answer, "I'll send you one." They have belt holsters, pocket holsters, no-holster clips and even a custom shop. We are in a renaissance with concealed carry and this company is one of the leaders.

These little guns are unique in their own way. They break down into only four major components: frame (the barrel is machined as part of the frame itself), slide, magazine and trigger group. The Guardian does NOT have

a magazine disconnect, and its double action only (DAO) trigger provides a second or third tap on a round that might not go off, without having to re-cock the slide. I like these last two features very much!

You get two magazines with each Guardian. One magazine has a finger extension that gives a good grip for the ring finger (the pinkie is on its own), and the other magazine is flush fitting; I like the flush mag, it's just svelte. Each of them holds six rounds (which gives you seven with one up the spout). A slot atop the slide lets you see the rim of a loaded round. The magazines fall only half way out when the release button is pushed; you need to pull them free. Remember, this gun isn't for knocking down rows of bowling pins; it sits with my keys and wallet in my drawer at night.

This is truly a lawyer's trigger, though, in that it has a long (DOA) pull at about 10 pounds, which suffices as the gun's only safety. This is becoming common in many new designs today, and this is one of the smoothest triggers I have ever cycled. NAA says they left it heavy for consistent ignition. I can live with it. The hammer fits flush with the rear of the slide, and I can't imagine how this gun could go off unless you intended it to.

The sights on the guardian are truly tiny; this is a point and shoot gun for most of its intent. I was amazed, though, at just how accurate it was when I tried, and no part of this gun hangs up on clothes or galls me, including the sights.

The perfect deep carry gun has yet to be designed, and many existing calibers already come close. However, the efficiency of the new .32 NAA round is what allows the small size of the Guardian to be so effective in its purpose. To my eyes, this is the best possible combination of covert ultra-conceal-ability and enough power available today.

Now we are talking about the back-up gun as PRIMARY CARRY! Oh, yeah, I can hear the howl rising from the major caliber crowd, but I am speaking from the covert, deeply hidden side of concealed carry. I will never again worry about having "enough gun" for my every-day use. Big bad dogs, rabid raccoons and feral human varmints should all take heed, with the .32 NAA, I am prepared! Mercury (the shiny liquid metal), known as QUICKSILVER, is no prettier than the satin stainless steel of this gun, and at over 1200 ft. per second, this truly is LIGHTNING! "Yep, shoots fire five feet."

Daniel Erin has lived in many places, currently in the wilds of Oregon. He has worn many hats, in fields as diverse as real estate, hospitality, chef and fly fishing instructor. Daniel is an FFL, CCW, NRA endowment member, hunter, hiker and believer in the Second Amendment.