



Gun Test - New NAA Guardian

By Mike Detty

North American Arms recently introduced a version of their Guardian pistol in a new chambering, the .32NAA. Using the pocket-sized .380 Guardian as a platform for the new cartridge, this little pocket rocket generates more velocity, stopping power and energy than any .32ACP or .380ACP bullet currently available.



Shown next to a .32ACP round the bottlenecked .32NAA cartridge (on right) is capable of delivering much more velocity and energy.

At last year's SHOT Show in Las Vegas, North American Arms' General Manager, Ken Friel, dropped a tiny cartridge in my hand. "That's our new .32NAA," said Friel, as I examined the bottleneck bullet. "It's basically a .380 case necked down to .32 caliber. We're able to push a 50-grain hollow point bullet at over 1200 feet per second (fps) for 200 foot pounds of energy (fpe) from a 2.5-inch barrel." That's pretty impressive ballistics for a blow back operated pocket gun.

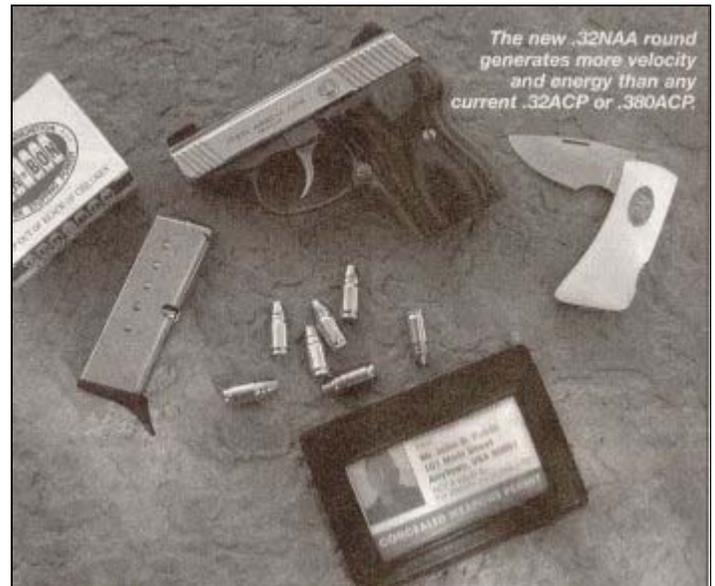
Friel offered me the opportunity to visit North American Arms' website and have their custom shop build me one in the new caliber to my specifications. With an offer like that how could I say no?

North American Arms introduced their Guardian in .32ACP in 1996. An unabashed copy of the Seecamp LWS pistol, NAA seized upon the unmet demand created by Seecamp. Featuring improvements like a 1911- style magazine release, disassembly takedown button and sights, the NAA Guardian was an immediate hit. It did everything the Seecamp gun did and,

best of all, it was available without a wait.

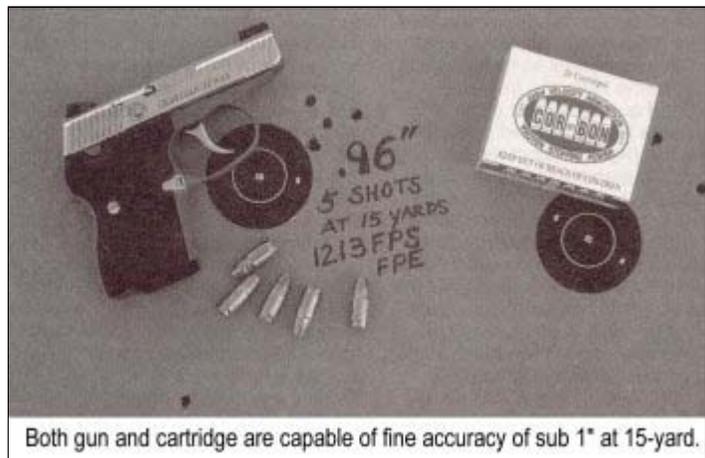
But bias against the tiny .32ACP cartridge, now over 100 years old, was a limiting factor in sales. Sandy Chisholm, NAA's President, felt that there existed a prejudice in the civilian world as well as law enforcement community that judged the .380ACP to be the minimum acceptable caliber for personal defense. "This is a natural progression for us," said Chisholm when NAA introduced the Guardian in .380ACP.

But building a new Guardian in .380ACP wasn't just a matter of rechambering the existing .32 gun. NAA partnered with Kahr Arms to re-engineer the gun for the more powerful round. Kahr had already been building NAA's frames and slides, and turned to Kahr's Justin Moon to design a gun capable of safely handling the .380 ACP. The result is a beautiful gun, constructed of 17-4 pH stainless steel. It weighs around 18.7 ounces (compared to 13.5 ounces for the .32 pistol) unloaded and has a thicker frame and slide than the .32 ACP version.



The new .32NAA round generates more velocity and energy than any current .32ACP or .380ACP.

With the .380 Guardian in production NAA set its sights on introducing the gun in its new wildcat cartridge. Since the new .32NAA is basically a .380 case necked down to .32, no new changes needed to be made, other than the barrel, for the gun to cycle with the .32 NAA bottleneck round.



Cor-Bon worked closely with North American Arms on this project and loaded the test ammo. After several months of experimentation a 50-grain Hornady hollow point bullet was decided on as optimum for the cartridge. The .32 NAA round was designed with headspace on its shoulder, and this allows the bullet to be firmly crimped into the case neck. This small detail prevents the bullet from being pushed back into the case under recoil, thereby increasing reliability and ballistic consistency. Its bottleneck configuration also enhances feeding.

Based on information provided to me by NAA, the new .32 NAA produces more velocity, energy and stopping power than any other .32ACP or .380ACP cartridges currently available. The new Cor-Bon loading drives its 60- grain hollow point bullet at over 1200 fps and develops 200 fpe. In comparison, a .32ACP Winchester Silvertip produces only 88 fpe from a 2-inch Guardian barrel. Penetration is always a concern when carrying these light caliber guns, especially if its wintertime and they might have to travel through a heavy jacket. During testing the .32 NAA penetrated through four layers of denim and still traveled 8.3 inches in ballistic gelatin. It expanded to an impressive 0.55 of an inch and retained all of its weight. What really impressed me was that NAA's data showed an impressive 1453 fps and 287 fpe from a 4-inch test barrel. Adding an inch and one-half of barrel increased velocity by 15% and energy by 30%. That gives me some ideas for re-chambering some existing guns to the .32 NAA.

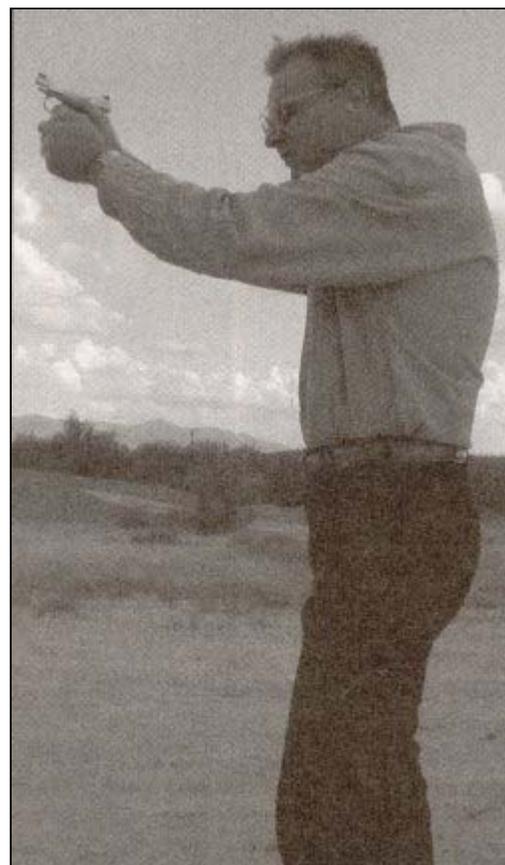
Gun Details

Friel's suggestion that I have a gun custom made by the NAA Custom Shop intrigued me. This was my chance to literally create a custom pocket pistol based on my own preferences. I wanted a gun that would look as good as it shoots and still be an acceptable last ditch defense gun.

What I had the North American Arms gunsmiths do was to polish the slide and barrel to a brilliant mirror-like finish. While they were at it they also polished and radiused the trigger to make double-action-only shooting more comfortable. Also buffed bright was the magazine release and grip screw heads. I wanted the slide to contrast the frame and had them bead blast the stainless frame to a non-reflective matte gray.

For a secure firing grip I had the NAA smiths stipple both the front and rear straps. Made by some sort of sharp point impact tool, the stippling feels like there has been a piece of emery cloth applied. A nice finishing touch was that the craftsmen cut a border at the top and bottom of the stippling. The result is a nearly slip-proof finish that is cosmetically appealing.

NAA produces their standard Guardians with fixed iron sights. They're low profile and tiny and I have found them difficult to use. Several years ago when their first .32 Guardian came out, I had mine customized by Scott, McDougall and Associates. One of the most important modifications that Mac Scott did was to add a tiny pair of Novak Tritium night sights. I had the NAA smiths do exactly the same. My custom test gun now has the Lo-Mount rear sight dovetailed in the top of the frame and it is drift adjustable for windage, something the factory rear sight cannot do. The matching front sight is expertly dovetailed and pinned into the slide. When shooting a small gun with a little barrel as the Guardian, it is



The little .32NAA is indeed a handful to shoot. Its muzzle blast is sharper than either the .32ACP or .380ACP.

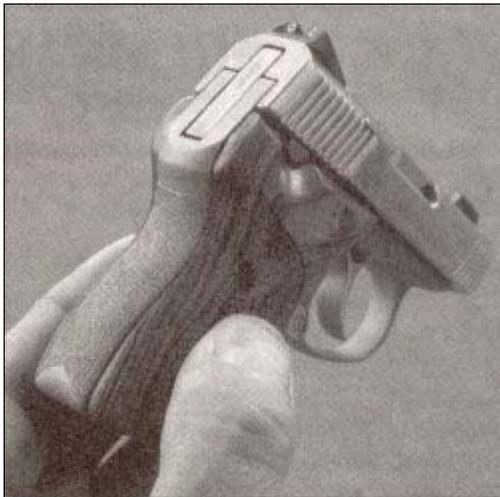
difficult to index the front of the gun. Short guns just don't point as naturally as longer barreled guns. By putting the big night-sight dot up front, it is easy to grab the Guardian quickly and find the front sight. The ability to do that in the dark is an added bonus.

The last two custom touches that I selected for the Guardian were a set of beautiful cocobolo checkered grips that add a splash of color to the gray frame, and had the NAA Custom Shop cut front and rear cocking serrations in the slide. Practical - not really, but they don't hurt anything either. Additionally, all of the frame's and slide's sharp corners were radiused to prevent any edges that might cut the shooter, holster or clothing.

North American Arms won't do anything to reduce the trigger pull on their guns for liability reasons. Not even for gun writers. But one of the benefits of the custom gun is that the internals are all given extra attention in terms of polish and I can guarantee that a gun coming through the Custom Shop will have a slicker, more hitch-free pull. In terms of weight, NAA shoots for a ten- pound trigger pull. Given the fact that there is no external safety and it is a gun that will most likely be secreted in some very personal areas, I would not purposely try to lower the pull weight. After all it is a pocket gun, not a target pistol.



NAA's gunsmiths put a high gloss polish on the slide and barrel of the custom Guardian. All sharp edges were also removed.



NAA's Custom Shop expertly stippled the back strap of this Guardian



Detty chose Novak Lo-Mount night sights for his custom Guardian.

How It Shoots

Shooting the little .32 NAA Guardian was an eye-opening experience. Here's a little gun whose bark is truly as bad as its bite. After firing my first two shots I had to stop and re-tighten the grip screws. This was something that I did throughout my evaluation. After a while I finally took the grips off and discovered that the machined wood projection that fits into a circular cut in the frame had broken causing the grips to shift. I replaced them with the synthetic grips and had no further problems. The wood grips are beautiful and really make the Guardian a showpiece but they do add bulk to the gun. I'll keep the wood grips for display but carry the pistol with the black rubber grips.

Muzzle blast from the .32 NAA is more pronounced than my .32ACP Guardian and even the .380ACP gun. In fact my new girlfriend, Laura, accompanied me on one of my outings with the Guardian. She's a new shooter and after I fired the gun, I was reluctant to have her shoot it, as I did not want to erode her enthusiasm for shooting by having her fire the little pit bull. Laura is a petite gal, standing not much more than 5'2" and she had difficulty retracting the slide far enough to chamber a round. The fact that I had the slide buffed to a mirror finish also made it more difficult for her to get a good purchase on the slide.

I set a steel target out at 20 yards. It approximates the size of a man's head and shoulders and I had no problem consistently hitting it with the Guardian. To test its accuracy I set up my paper targets at 15 yards and shot from a seated rest. Using a Millett BenchMaster for support I slowly squeezed off my shots double-action. I was surprised to find the tiny groups that the .32 NAA Cor-Bon loads printed. Groups averaged around 2 inches with the best coming in at just 0.96 of an inch. Not bad for a pocket pistol, huh?

Mentioned earlier is that the bottle-neck cartridges have better reliability. Their tapered shape helps funnel the round into the chamber. With over 200 rounds I have yet to have my first failure with this Guardian.

Carry Options The term "Pocket Pistol" is both generic and descriptive. It is an adjective used by numerous gun companies to describe their little handguns. Unfortunately, too many shooters take the term too literally and want to carry the gun in their pockets. Believe me, I'm not just trying to make points with the holster companies here, I have tried carrying pistols in my pocket and here is what I have experienced. When you need to grab the gun quickly you find that it has flipped around in your pocket. Or, somehow the magazine release has been hit and when the gun is drawn the magazine noisily clatters to the ground. Or perhaps something else in your pocket, like a key or cough drop, has wedged itself between the trigger and the frame of the gun. There's just no reason to foolishly experience these same problems for yourself. A number of holster companies make gun carriers that ride inside the pocket and keep the gun in a consistent position so that it may be withdrawn easily. They also keep other objects from touching the trigger of the gun while it is in the pocket.

Galco has a slick new holster for pistols called the USA (Ultimate Second Amendment). It is designed to be worn inside the pants but has a unique polymer J-hook that goes over the top of the pants and behind your belt and hooks at the belt's bottom. This allows the shirt to be tucked over the gun for complete concealment with only a small part of the J-hook tab being visible at the bottom of your belt. It's constructed of premium horsehide and has sewn in sight rails, and it is also available in right or left hand versions. It keeps the gun secure, in position and out of sight, in short it does everything a good holster should without sacrificing anything. I like it a lot and will be carrying my custom Guardian in it.

I also received a sample of an ankle holster from a new company called Ankle Pocket. It is constructed of orthopedic grade neoprene and is padded for wearer comfort. It features hook and loop closures and is one-size-fits-all in design. I like to wear mine on my left ankle. I think this type of holster really proves useful when sitting at a restaurant table or driving as the left ankle can be moved to the right hand without drawing much attention. For security there's a safety strap to keep the gun in the holster while running or other strenuous activity. Ankle Pocket is the most comfortable ankle holster that I have found to date and it is completely machine washable.

Finally, North American Arms supplies the Guardian with a DeSantis nylon case. About the size of a Palm Pilot case it has a spring steel belt loop on the back so the non-descript case can be worn on the hip. There's even enough room inside for an extra magazine.

Final Notes

If you have a hankering to carry a small autopistol that produces twice as much horsepower as the .32ACP you'll need to take a look at North American Arms' .32 NAA Guardian. It comes with two magazines - one has a flush fit base pad and the other has a finger hook to give the fourth finger a place to ride while shooting. Retail price of the .32 NAA Guardian is \$449. With all the custom shop additions my sample has the price goes up to \$938. To learn more about the North American Arms' .32 NAA Guardian contact them at 2150 South 950 East, Dept CH, Provo, UT 84606; 800-821-5783; www.naaminis.com.

Specifications: NAA Guardian .32 NAA

CALIBER: .32 NAA
BARREL: 2.5"
OA LENGTH: 4.75"
WIDTH: .93"
HEIGHT: 3.53"
WEIGHT: 18.7 ounces
OPERATION: DAO, semi-auto
MATERIAL: 17-4 pH stainless steel
CAPACITY: 6 + 1

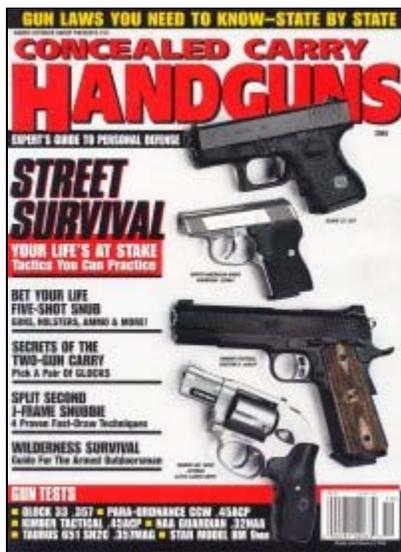
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