

A TALE OF TWO .32 GUARDIANS

North American Arms magnificent mini-guns—which is best for you!

By Mike Detty

It was in 1998 that North American Arms introduced the .32ACP Guardian pocket pistol and it became immediately popular with shooters looking for a compact autopistol. Answering the demand for a more powerful pistol, NAA bulked up the Guardian and introduced a .380 version back in 2001. By necking down the .380 case to accept a .32 bullet, NAA increased velocity and energy and introduced yet another Guardian, this one chambered for the bottlenecked .32NAA cartridge. The popularity of the Guardian family is no accident. They are well made, reliable, and answer the need for a concealable, double-action-only pistol.

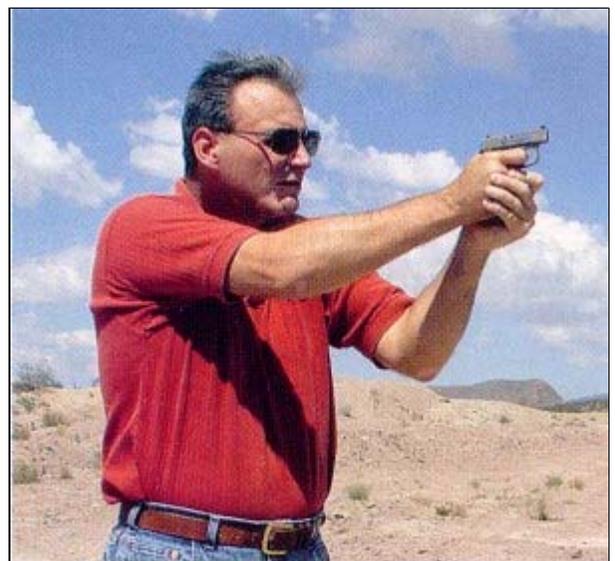


NAA's Custom Shop Guardian (top) is shown with an original L.W. Seecamp .32ACP pistol.

Development & Evolution

For years serious defense devotees of tiny semi-autos would pay sometimes two or three times the retail price for one of Larry Seecamp's LWS32 pistols. Seecamp's production was limited and as the demand outpaced the supply, prices skyrocketed.

Seecamp builds his .32's from stainless steel for its corrosion resistance and incorporates a double-action-only trigger pull for safety. Devoid of any sights, the Seecamp gun is designed for up close and personal protection. Seecamp told me a few years back that his father's design for the little .32ACP was not meant to be an all-out answer to a defense gun. "Dad designed that gun to be secreted when carrying a larger gun is impossible. His intent was to use this pistol to fight your way to a larger gun."



Comfortable to shoot and plenty accurate, the Guardian pistols have become popular with concealed weapons aficionados.

According to Seecamp, his father said that the pocket pistol should be like a woman's shoe, "small on the outside and large on the inside." The long and relatively heavy double-action-only trigger provided a reasonable amount of safety for a gun that possessed no manual safety. Its spurless hammer sits flush with the back of the slide and is unlikely to snag when drawn from a coat pocket or ankle holster. Without any external protuberances, with the exception of the magazine heel catch, the Seecamp LWS offered its owners a sleek, snag-free, corrosion resistant, .32 ACP semi-auto that could be concealed just about anywhere.

Enter North American Arms

North American Arms recognized the opportunity to capitalize on Seecamp's limited production and unmet demand. NAA started by listening to the minimal criticisms of the Seecamp gun and made some changes to its design. Most notable is the addition of sights. While this isn't the type of gun you would be using at extended ranges, it's still nice to be able to have sights for when there's a need. NAA also incorporated a 1911 style push-button magazine release, replacing the heel clip style of the Seecamp gun. A disassembly button was added to the right side of the pistol for easier field stripping, while the magazine safety has been deleted.

To address the issue of production, North American Arms contracted with Kahr Arms to produce their stainless steel slides and frames. Many folks don't realize that Kahr and its parent company, Saeilo Enterprises, not only produces parts and fixtures for other companies in the firearms industry, but also supplies computer, automotive and medical fields. Their ability to consistently produce parts while maintaining tight tolerances is what attracted North American Arms' attention. With Kahr manufacturing their major components, NAA figured that they'd be able to keep pace with demand and priced their Guardians accordingly.

I received my first .32ACP Guardian in 1997 and was impressed by its cosmetics and the fact that it worked perfectly with every .32ACP load I fired in it. It was a couple ounces heavier than the Seecamp gun, and wider in the grip and slide area. Made from 17-4 pH stainless steel



The NAA custom shop produced a Guardian (right) that is very much like the one the author had customized years ago (left).



The .32NAA gun is noticeably bigger than its .32ACP brother.



Guardians, both the .32ACP and .32NAA, use a dual spring recoil system.

for corrosion resistance, my sample was well finished.

I liked my original Guardian well enough to purchase my evaluation sample and, I eventually had the action slicked up as well as a neat set of mini Novak night sights added.

Custom Gun Details

North American Arms established their own custom shop not too much later and it offers the customers one-stop shopping for many common sense modifications. A variety of finishes, slide serrations, front and backstrap textures, as well as custom grips are a few of the NAA Custom Shop options.

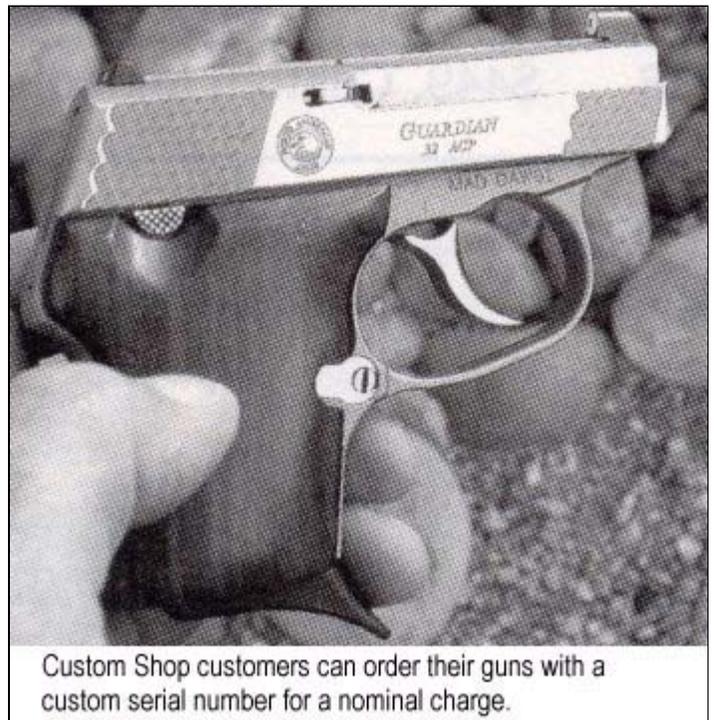
For the purpose of this article I ordered a .32ACP Guardian through North American Arms' Custom Shop. After studying the Custom Shop's offerings on their website, here's what I selected: fish scale style cocking serrations fore and aft, a rounded and polished trigger, XS Express Sights with a large tritium dot front sight and a handsome set of laminated Hogue Pau Ferro grips. My final custom addition was to add my own customized serial number, MADDAWG1, to the gun.



XS tritium front sight provides night fighting capability for the Guardian.

One modification not offered by the Custom Shop is a tuned trigger. That's probably a good thing anyway, at least for the sake of liability. For a gun that weighs less than a pound, has no manual safety, and will frequently be concealed, I would think that a light trigger would be a downright liability. My Custom Shop .32ACP Guardian's trigger travels almost an inch before breaking at just over 13 pounds, minimizing the chances of an accidental discharge.

Despite the heavy trigger pull I was able to manage some pretty good 15-yard, 5-shot groups measuring between 0.75 of an inch and 2.25 inches. The large XS tritium front sight is an invaluable aid for me. Computers and age have deteriorated my vision, and the large glow dot at the end of the barrel is necessary for me, especially



Custom Shop customers can order their guns with a custom serial number for a nominal charge.

if I'm not wearing my glasses. Let's face it; this is not the type of gun that you'll use to engage distant targets. But at short distances the sights, even if they're only used to reference the end of the barrel, may be useful.

More Horsepower

Earlier in the year I reviewed the new Guardian chambered for the .32NAA. Basically it is a .380 cartridge necked down to accept a .32 bullet. The resulting bottleneck cartridge pushes a 60-grain bullet over 1200 feet per second (fps) and develops over 200 foot pounds of energy (fpe). Just for comparison, a Winchester 60-grain Silvertip in .32ACP only generates 95 fpe and the .380 ACP 85-grain SilverTip delivers about 180 fpe from the stubby Guardian barrel.

Using the .380 Guardian frame as the platform for the new supercharged cartridge, NAA was able to keep the pistol's dimensions and weight manageable. Understandably, the slide and grip of the .32NAA gun is wider and heavier than the .32ACP version.

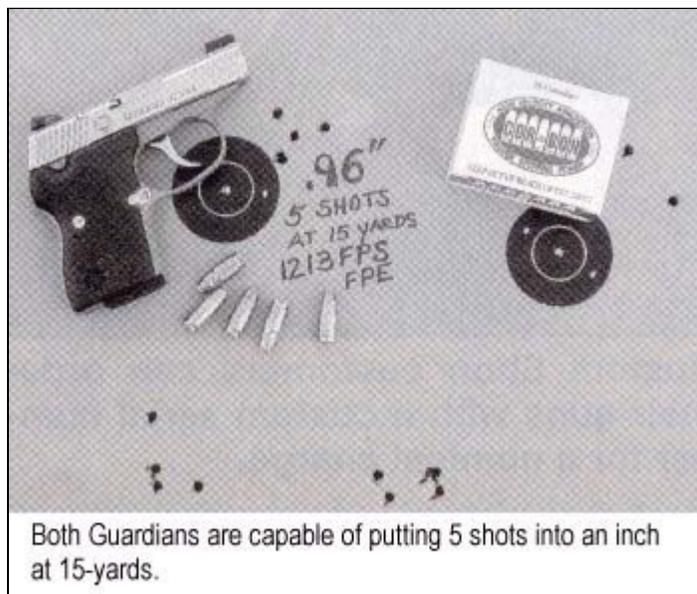
More Custom Details

Again, the folks at NAA were kind enough to let me design my own test gun by selecting Custom Shop modifications. Here's what I chose: a brightly polished slide and barrel, front and rear slide cocking serrations, mini Novak tritium night sights, a rounded and polished trigger, stippling on both the front and rear straps, and custom Cocobolo grips. It is a beautiful gun and I found the work performed by the North American Arms gunsmiths to be impeccable.

There's no such thing as a free lunch and the .32NAA is a perfect example. Muzzle blast from the 2.5-inch barrel is substantial and recoil is sharp. So sharp, in fact, that I had to stop every few shots to re-tighten the grip screws. The .32NAA Guardian is just an ounce or so over a pound in weight, so it's no surprise that the recoil and muzzle blast generated by this mini-hotrod caliber is somewhat obnoxious.

All Guardian pistols use a dual recoil spring system, one small spring surrounded by a larger diameter spring to provide all of the spring mass needed to keep the slide in battery and retard the slide's velocity. The heavier springs needed for the .32NAA make retracting the slide, to chamber a round, difficult. The heavy springs and polished slide flats that I ordered from the Custom Shop made it nearly impossible for my girlfriend Laura, to manually retract the slide.

Just what kind of accuracy can you expect from a pocket-size semi-auto? Well, this particular gun kept most 5-



shot 15-yard groups under 2 inches and a few under one inch. I have a steel reactive target that approximates a man's head and shoulders and, I set it up at 20 yards. Even though the pistol is double-action-only, I was able to consistently hit the target by watching the sights and steadily increasing pressure on the trigger until the shot broke.

As for reliability, the .32NAA Guardian was 100% reliable. The only rounds that I had to test the weapon with were Cor-Bon's 50-grain jacketed hollow points. These loads produced over 1200 fps and 200 fpe. The .32NAA was designed to headspace on its shoulder and the bullet is heavily crimped into the neck of the case, preventing the bullets from being pushed back into the case during recoil. The bottleneck shape also helps funnel the round into the chamber, improving reliability.

New Accessories

Ken Friel, North American Arms General Manager, sent me a new 10-round magazine for the .32ACP Guardian. It extends past the bottom of the grip frame and provides a secure full-length grip for the shooter. I found that it makes the pistol much easier to shoot and offers a degree of versatility for the Guardian. If you're carrying it concealed, use the 6-round magazine with the flat floorplate. Should you carry the gun in some sort of holster, then you can use the hooked floorplate that offers shooters a little more comfort in the grip. Using the Guardian as a car gun? That's when the 10-round magazine makes sense. NAA cautions that the extended magazine should be used with round nose ammunition only for the sake of reliability, but I found that my gun/magazine combo worked perfectly with Winchester's SilverTip bullets. Ten-round magazines are also available for the .380ACP Guardians.

Which Guardian?

Which Guardian is right for you? That's a decision you'll have to make for yourself. But I have to assume that if you're looking at the Guardian pistols as a potential carry gun, then you are also looking for something that's small and concealable. Let's do some quick calculations. The .32NAA is 28% heavier than the .32ACP version, though the more powerful pistol is only 9% wider. Both guns have the same capacity, 6 + 1, yet the .32NAA is only 3/10 of an inch longer than the .32ACP gun.

Accuracy with both guns is about the same, though

the .32NAA generates twice the energy of the .32ACP. Drawbacks with the more powerful gun are its muzzle blast

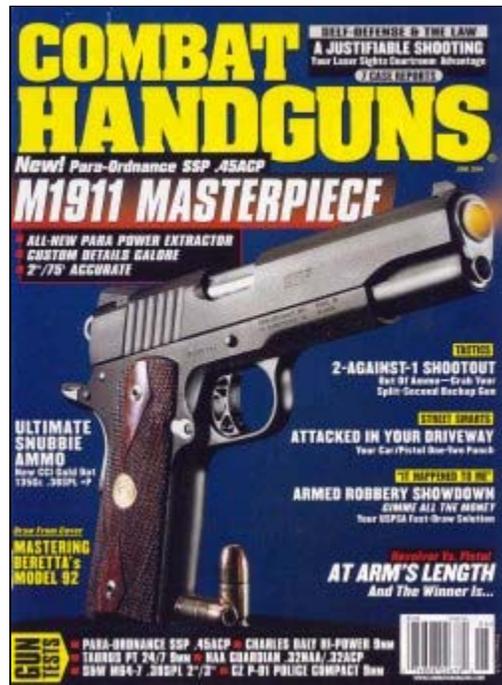
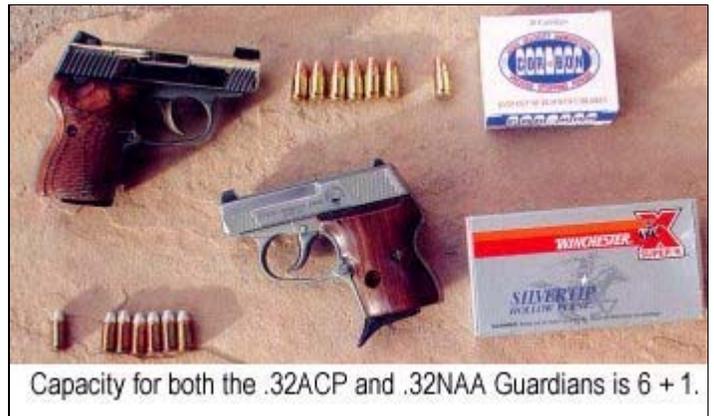


The .32NAA cartridge requires that the gun be 3/10" longer and 9% wider than its .32ACP brother.

Specifications: NAA Guardian .32		
	.32ACP	.32NAA
CALIBER:	.32ACP	.32NAA
BARREL:	2.00 inches	2.50 inches
OA LENGTH:	4.36 inches	4.75 inches
WIDTH:	0.85 inches	0.93 inches
HEIGHT:	3.30 inches	3.53 inches
WEIGHT:	13.5 ounces	18.7 ounces
ACTION:	DAO, blowback	DAO, blowback
TRIGGER PULL:	13 pounds	10 pounds
MATERIAL:	17-4 pH Stainless Steel	17-4 pH Stainless Steel
CAPACITY:	6 + 1	6 + 1
PRICE:	\$408, Custom tested \$736	\$449, Custom tested \$938

and recoil. If the Guardian is to be a backup gun to a heavier primary gun, then the .32ACP will probably suffice. However, if the Guardian were to be the primary pistol, then I would go with the .32NAA.

Regardless of which Guardian you select, you can be assured you'll be packing a well made and reliable pistol. For more information on North American Arms' line of Guardian autopistols, check out their website.



From Combat Handguns
June 2004 Edition
www.combathandguns.com