A FEW GOOD GUN HABITS

Get the right habits for your handgun – familiarity should breed professionalism!
By Walt Rauch

Habits - there are good ones and bad ones. Of course, in the real world you should be predictably unpredictable. But there are good habits to acquire when caring for and feeding your defensive firearm. Be casual with toys-but not tools. For purposes of this discussion, I'll use the 1911 and S&W M10 revolver as the examples on which these habits should be applied.

Each time you pick up or remove the 1911 from its location of carry or storage, in the cocked and locked mode (except in response to a threat, of course) always push "up" with your thumb on the thumb safety, verifying that the gun is "on safe." This good habit has two purposes-the obvious, you know the gun is "on safe;" the not-so-obvious benefit is that by repetitively doing this you are reflexively acquiring the thumb safety when gripping the gun.

If the 1911 has an ambidextrous safety, it is almost guaranteed to be pushed oft at some point in time by covering clothing, seat belts, etc., this reflexive verifying can be part of preventing a negligent discharge. (Of course, other ambidextrous safety designs are not immune from accidental movement and also need to be checked. Having your slide-mounted safety pushed on could be fatal.) Along with this habit, I also verify that the safety(s) are on with the gun holstered for, despite using what are considered to be the best of concealment rigs, I've found my safety pushed oft on occasion, yet another good reason for keeping your finger oft the trigger until ready to shoot.
Another good habit: I make sure the magazine is locked into the gun by pushing and then tugging on it when first loading it. Curiously, this action is part of the loading drill with magazine fed rifles and submachine guns, but is quite often overlooked with a handgun. The need for this is repeatedly demonstrated in competitions where inevitably, a contestant's magazine drops out when he starts a stage or falls out after a reload, his having failed to seat it completely in either case. Checking to make sure the magazine is still in the gun, as with the previously mentioned thumb safety check, is also a good practice.

As to the loaded state of the magazine, I've had the experience of "knowing" I had a full magazine in the gun but it wasn't full. If you take the magazine out, look and feel before you re-insert, then you'll be sure it's full. At those same pistol matches, I've watched experienced shooters insert what they thought was a full magazine—but it wasn't!

Another benefit of checking the gun while holstered is that you know you still have the gun and have not left it in the men's room or some place else! (As I was writing this, my morning paper had this item: (Philadelphia Inquirer 3-6-04, "...Philadelphia police officer lost his service weapon in a bathroom in Family Court...(he) went to use a restroom...but when he walked out (he) left behind his GLOCK 9mm pistol..." You definitely don't want to ever do anything like that!

Now, is your gun loaded? While a "Press Check" should normally suffice, better yet, simply chamber a fresh round and top off (or not) the magazine.

With all these potential errors attributable to an autopistol, going with a revolver might look to be the smarter choice, but it has its idiosyncrasies also. I've learned that after loading and closing the cylinder of a revolver, you should pull back slightly on the hammer and rotate the cylinder completely once or twice. This verifies there are no high primers in the loaded rounds; that the cylinder is completely closed and none of the bullets protrude from the front of the cylinder.

With a concealed-hammer revolver, unlocking the cylinder can be dangerous. To unlock the cylinder, pressure must be put on the trigger. This technique needs lots of
practice with an unloaded gun before going "live." As well as being very careful of the muzzle direction!

Also, get in the habit of checking that all the screws are still tightened. The thumb-latch screw is particularly susceptible to working loose. At the very least, you'll lose the thumb piece and screw. At worst, the cylinder won't open. Another pesky part is the extractor rod, which also can come loose. At best, you can't open or close the gun and, at worst, the cylinder will not revolve.

It is difficult but not impossible, by accident, to push or pull the cylinder release while shooting. One of the grand debates of yesteryear was whether the Colt design, which required pulling back on the cylinder release, rather than the S&W design, where you push forward, was the "safer" gun. In my experience, it doesn't matter. I've done it and have seen it done with either make.

Another thing: Get in the habit of firmly closing the cylinder with one hand while holding the gun with the other, not just flipping the cylinder open and closed. Doing this will quickly bend the crane, and the gun will begin misfiring.

Yet, another good habit: Inspect every round as you load it for, despite the best quality controls, defective rounds do get by. Such as ammo without a primer or the case crushed down one side. I've had .380ACP rounds mixed in a 9mm box of ammo. I've had the bullets easily push back in the case.

One last habit you must acquire (along with the four basic rules of gun safety, that is): Visually and physically verify that the gun is unloaded. The old saying is "familiarity breeds contempt," and it's all too easy to simply "look" to see if a chamber is empty and, after a while, you will see what you want to see. Along with this goes the practice of rechecking the gun if it's out of your hands even for a moment. The better saying should be, "familiarity breeds professionalism!"

**GUNS**

The North American Arms (NAA) Guardian series of pocket autos are some of the best of the genre and well they should be, since they are a variation of the seminal Seecamp design.

In reviewing my notes, I found that I got my first .32ACP NAA in 1997, and over the intervening years, I have also had the pleasure of reviewing larger Guardians, first
in .380ACP, and then in .32NAA. This latter round is the .380ACP case necked down to fire a .32 caliber bullet to higher velocities than is possible with either caliber. The .32NAA was the result of a joint effort between Cor-Bon and North American Arms. This idea was then carried over to the .32ACP, necking it down to .25 caliber. Such achieves two goals: higher velocity and the .25NAA works in the smaller Guardian platform.

I requested a "plain Jane" version, only adding the XS Express small-dot with Tritium insert front sight and "V" notch rear sight. The gun comes with two 6-round magazines, each with four numbered witness holes, one with and one without a finger rest floor plate.

Jumping ahead to the shooting - after firing the gun with both magazines, I didn't see the need for the finger rest since the recoil is relatively mild. (I didn't get the usual hitting of my trigger finger with the triggerguard on each shot due to recoil.) In fact, the recoil seemed to me to be no more than I get firing a .25ACP cartridge from my .25ACP Browning.

Over the Chrony chronograph, five rounds averaged 1221 feet per second (fps) with a Hornady XTP bullet weighing 35 grains. Joe Venezia and I then shot at an oval Shoot-N-C target 9.5 inches long by 6 inches wide at 15 yards distance with a nice tight group of 2x2 inches landing at 3 o'clock at the edge of the target. This is not a problem, since not too
many will do much target work at 15 yards with such a small gun, and the rear sight is windage-drift-adjustable, so a correction can be made.

Initially, Joe and I experienced repeated failures to eject with cases being caught either straight up or front to rear in the ejection port. Since we were shooting the all stainless steel gun right out of the box, I applied light lubrication to the rails as well as the side of the fixed barrel and had no more malfunctions.

The .25NAA and .32ACP Guardians share the same overall outside dimensions and use the same internal components, except for the chamber and bore on the .25NAA. The stainless steel gun has Hogue-made black nylon, pebbled-surface grip panels held with one screw on each side. The magazine release button is grooved and at the bottom rear of the triggerguard. An external spring-loaded extractor is used.

Disassembly is easy. Depress and hold the takedown button, which is at the top rear of the right side of the frame. Pull the slide back and up to remove. A Wolff-made dual recoil spring is used that has a small metal "button" in the front, in effect a recoil spring guide. Reassemble in reverse order but avoid dry firing, which North American Arms cautions against. There is no magazine safety, so the gun will fire with the magazine removed.

The Guardian comes with a DeSantis black nylon zippered and lockable belt pouch that has a belt clip on it so that the pouch can double as a belt holster. Inside the belt pouch, a compartmented elastic band holds the Guardian and the spare magazine. The package retails for just over $400.

One final note-the Guardian does not have an ejector. The fired case is kicked out by bumping into the loaded round in the magazine, so on the last shot you can have a failure to eject the fired case. This is normal and not a defect.

As to the viability of the .25NAA, it does have high velocity and a good (the Hornady XTP) bullet. On paper, the .25NAA looks to be better than the .25ACP and the .32ACP, and odds are you'll carry this when you might not a .45. Besides, now you have very little excuse not to carry two guns!

GEAR

The Wells Made holster and concealment systems are truly custom made, both pleasing to the eye and totally functional as excellent concealed-carry rigs. George Wells started making holsters in the mid '90s, driven to do so because he could not find a holster that satisfied him.
George almost literally makes a holster for you as a custom tailor would make a suit. He wants to know height, weight, suit size, body frame and any physical peculiarities so that he can best cut the rig for you. He works with Fleming’s of Buckhead in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia, which is a custom belt shop (a convenient marriage to be sure), known for the finest alligator belt (according to owner Bob Childs) in the world. The two joined forces to make both the holster and the support system.

At first, George sent a high-end rig for the 1911 and, while quite beautiful, it was not exactly what I had in mind. (I thought the elegant leather might be too thin for hard use.) He then made another rig, "field grade" with two thicknesses of leather and waterproofing acrylic resin for the new GLOCK 37. Being more rigid, I definitely liked this holster better.

George offers his Wells Made holsters in 20 colors of alligator and ostrich as well as over 60 colors of leather, so even the pickiest should be able to find that just-right combination.