

North American Arms: The Big Little- Gun Company

THIS LONGTIME MAKER OF CONCEALABLE **SMALL-FRAME HANDGUNS** HAS MADE A **BIG IMPACT** ON THE FIREARMS MARKET.

By **Scott Bestul**

I think it was Miss Kitty, the legendary lady saloon matron of Gunsmoke fame. Or perhaps it was another lady who held court in a dusty tavern in one of the dozens of B-Westerns I've watched through the years.

No matter. The woman's identity isn't as important as how she handled the situation. A rowdy cowpoke has one whiskey too many and gets loud, obnoxious and borderline violent. Most patrons watch sheepishly, but not Miss Kitty. She calls the lout on his boorish behavior and issues an ultimatum: Clean it up, or get out of the bar.

Naturally, the vaquero isn't taking guff from anyone, especially a member of the fairer sex. But Miss Kitty isn't your standard-issue 19th-century woman. She holds her ground with a level stare, and when the thug gets ugly, our heroine produces a little derringer from the folds of her dress and "addresses" her confronter. The sidearm is no Peacemaker, but it catches the cowpoke bully's attention.

After a long, appreciative stare, the ne'er-do-well sullenly slinks from the saloon. If, like me, you can watch such a scene and cheer for Miss Kitty, you can appreciate the sidearms offered by North American Arms. Nestled in the scenic outskirts of Provo, Utah, NAA has an established reputation for producing small, highly concealable weapons that can get you out of just such a pinch.



"Every once in a while, I hear from a [pistol] fan who'll say, 'I never buy anything smaller than a .45;'" NAA owner and CEO Sandy Chisholm said. "Well, nothing against those bigger guns, but the problem is, they're so rarely there when you truly need them. I'm fond of saying, 'A small gun is better than no gun at all.'"

Solid Beginnings

According to Chisholm, NAA was started almost three decades ago by a pair of well-recognized gun designers: Wayne Baker and Dick Casull.

"Dick Casull developed the popular .454 cartridge that bears his name, among others;" he said. "And Wayne Baker started Freedom Arms, a company that specialized in large-frame revolvers like the .454 Casull. Baker and Casull were outstanding designers, but they lacked the machinery and equipment needed for mass production. So they formed a relationship with Frank Talley, who eventually purchased the company from them. Talley

was also involved in the aerospace industry and had extensive experience producing precision instrumentation for missile launchers and bomb racks. He had the equipment for forging and casting the revolvers.” Though NAA - originally called Rocky Mountain Arms - was successful for Talley, the company was not high on his radar screen.

very loyal customers among the law-enforcement community. Our guns are not the primary weapons used by police officers, of course, but as the smallest fully functioning handguns available, they're perfect for an officer looking for a companion weapon that's virtually undetectable. We like to say that, ‘There's no excuse for not carrying’ one of our guns.”



North American Arms specializes in small handguns designed for personal protection. The company offers a dozen pistols, ranging from .17-caliber revolvers to a .380-caliber semiauto model, plus many high-performance accessories.

“Talley wanted to sell it, but not desperately;” Chisholm said. “NAA was operating under difficult times. Litigation against firearms manufacturers was an increasingly difficult hurdle, and with, Talley's other interests, NAA wasn't receiving the attention or investment it could have. The company I worked for, which was called Teleflex, charged me to sell NAA for Talley. Well, during the two years I spent doing that, I began to believe the marketing hype I was pitching to potential buyers. I felt that - with proper attention - the company could flourish, and I was interested in changing careers anyway. So when the opportunity came up to purchase NAA, I jumped at the chance. Now I'm the chief cook and bottle washer for a company I believe in very deeply.”

Top-End "Little Guns"

Chisholm said NAA specializes in "small handguns for personal protection.”

“They're all small-frame, small-caliber weapons designed to be super-concealable:” he said. “Their intent is to get you or your wife to the car safely in areas or at times when you think your personal safety might be endangered. For this reason, they're a perfect match for civilians where conceal-carry laws allow their use, but we also have some

NAA offers a dozen handguns, ranging from .17-caliber revolvers to a .380-caliber semiauto pistol.

“When I first acquired NAA, the entire line consisted of .22-caliber revolvers,” Chisholm said. “We continue to sell a lot of these, largely because they are extremely small, light and easy to operate. Hikers and cyclists can tote them without a second thought. And collectors have also enjoyed them, often embellishing them with custom engraving.” But Chisholm knew there was room for NAA to expand beyond the revolver market.

“We discovered a real need among customers for a semiautomatic model;” he said. “Another company produced them, but they couldn't meet the demand in a timely manner. We were also hearing from law enforcement that they were looking hard for larger calibers than the .22; and when we came out with semiautos in .25, .32 and .380, the response was very positive. We've since developed some proprietary cartridges for the .25 [by necking down a .32] and the .32 [by necking down a .380], and have been able to achieve some tremendous velocities that have attracted some attention. Actually, one of our top challenges has been obtaining ammo for these guns. Cor-Bon and Extreme Shock are our primary producers, but we haven't been able to generate

interest from the larger ammo manufacturers.”

An extensive line of accessories has also proven “wildly successful” with NAA customers, Chisholm said. Some of the slickest are designed for the miniature line, such as belt-buckle holsters that keep a revolver close at hand, and lanyard rings that allow a small gun to be attached to a key ring or purse handle for easy access. Custom holsters for the larger guns are also available. They allow safe, concealed carry yet quick access at the ankle, pocket or belt.

Grips, sights and extra magazines - such as extended 10-shot models for the practice range - let owners of NAA guns further customize their weapons. NAA also has a custom shop that can alter the finish of your gun according to preference.

Strong Traditions, Positive Future

Since its inception, NAA has maintained its headquarters in Utah and has been staffed by knowledgeable employees. “There was never any thought of moving the company when I bought it, and the biggest reason was the employees,” Chisholm said. “I live in Philadelphia, and I knew I couldn’t move out there, and there was no reason for them to come to me. So, I fly out once a month to my office there, and when I’m away, they do just fine without me. We currently have 35 employees, and they’re very experienced and passionate about what we do.”

“Our turnover is small, and six of my staff have, been here over 20 years. I consider the people who work at NAA my greatest blessing.” Though NAA has flourished under Chisholm’s direction, he credits the current social and political climate for helping NAA and other gun companies maintain steady growth.

“The litigious environment we live in can certainly be challenging, but the Senate passage of the [Protection of the Lawful Commerce in Arms Act], which protects manufacturers and distributors in cases of criminal use of firearms, was critical,” he said. “Obviously, the entire firearms industry has undergone great expense to battle the lawsuits that have threatened us, and hopefully we’ve begun to turn the corner in this area.”

“Also, the expansion of conceal-carry legislation across the nation has helped us tremendously. My home state of Pennsylvania, for example, is a shall-issue state, which means unless you are a criminal or they can find another reason to show why you shouldn’t be allowed to carry a handgun, they must issue you’ a permit to carry one.

“The growing popularity of such legislation in other states is proof that we’re realizing that an armed society is a polite, safe one. Statistics that [prove this] can’t be denied anymore.”

The Best Kind of Stopping Power

But, as Chisholm pointed out, statistics only explain part of the popularity of small, concealable, quality sidearms like those produced by NAA. Satisfied customers complete the rest of the picture.

“We’ve got literally reams of files containing letters from people who’ve used our guns to save their lives or defuse a potential situation,” he said. “And that’s why we manufacture these guns. They are not the type of weapon you use to start a situation, but they can be the perfect solution for stopping one.”

-- Scott Bestul is the “Collector’s Spotlight” and “Outside the Barrel” columnist for Gun List. He hails from southeastern Minnesota.

Gun List
NEWS, PRICING & GUNS FOR SALE
SEPTEMBER 23, 2005
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A RECENT BATTLE DECISION HAS PUT THE FIREARMS IMPORT INDUSTRY IN A TUGS AND CONSUMERS, SHOOTERS AND GUN COLLECTORS WILL SOON FEEL THE RESULTING SQUEEZE.
BY SCOTT BESTUL
On July 11, 2005, U.S. firearms importers get the shock of their lives when the House of Abolish, Thomas, Firearms and Explosives released an open letter regarding their of massive changes in how they would be doing business. On the one hand, not doing business. Further, more people believe the changes were pitted and kept both hands for months.
Continued PAGE 8

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