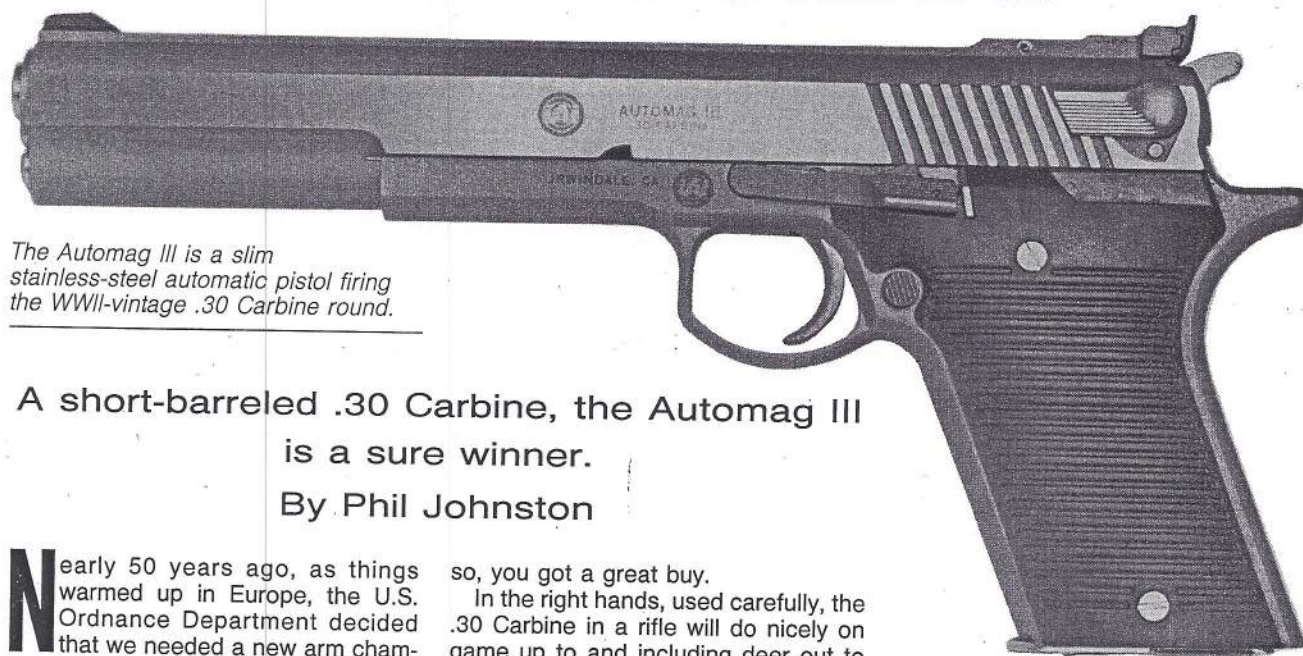


AUTOMAG NUMBER THREE



The Automag III is a slim stainless-steel automatic pistol firing the WWII-vintage .30 Carbine round.

A short-barreled .30 Carbine, the Automag III is a sure winner.

By Phil Johnston

Nearly 50 years ago, as things warmed up in Europe, the U.S. Ordnance Department decided that we needed a new arm chambered for a new round. The goal was for a light, compact firearm that might have advantages over then-common arms. Not a bad idea today, either.

Back then, however, the objectives were met when the M1 carbine burst on the scene to be officially adopted by our military in 1941. The cartridge was (and is), of course, the .30 Carbine—a redesign of the .32 Winchester Self Loading which dated back to 1906. The .30-caliber M1 launched 110-grain round-nose ball projectiles at nearly 2,000 fps and gave a good account of itself in the hostilities of the day, becoming somewhat of a pet to those who carried an M1 carbine and needed it to stay alive. Naturally, many M1s found their way home with GIs to collect dust on the wall, in the closet, or in the field as plinkers/hunters. More fuel was added to the .30 Carbine fire when surplus carbines were sold to civilians through the NRA in the early '60s. If any of you purchased them for \$20 or

so, you got a great buy.

In the right hands, used carefully, the .30 Carbine in a rifle will do nicely on game up to and including deer out to 75 yards or so, and the round is flat fun to shoot if plinking is the game at hand. The round when launched from the semi-auto rifle recoils little, and with surplus ammo around it's cheap as well as fun to shoot. It was so popular in rifles that someone just had to try it in our short guns, and, presto, the same qualities popped up even with less barrel.

The first .30 Carbine pistol was as near as I can tell the Kimball. It was based on a vintage High Standard design and consisted of a delayed-blowback semi-auto chambered for .22 Hornet and .38 Special, in addition to the booming .30. The Kimball popped into the scene in the mid-1950s and earned a quick reputation pertaining to self-destruction. Some question about the shooter's safety also cropped up in the process. The last Kimball left the Detroit, Michigan, plant in 1958. There were evidently 238 Kimballs marketed, so if you have one in good shape, it's

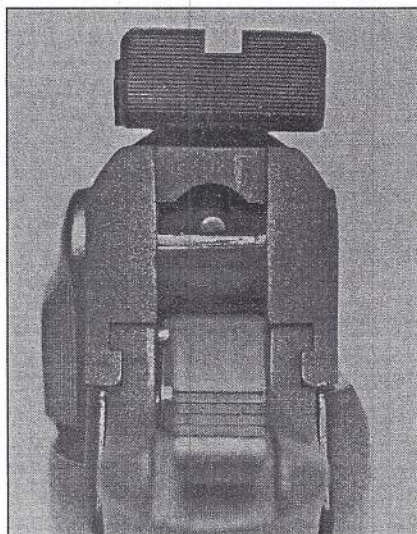
good property.

About a dozen years later, Ruger announced that the Blackhawk would be chambered for the hot .30, and although not particularly brisk in the sales department, the .30 is still cataloged by Ruger and remains a consistent seller and performer. Performance is excellent in the field as long as one keeps the round's potential in its proper perspective. In a rifle, the .30 squeaks into deer territory by the hair on its skin in trained hands. Such is *not* the case with pistol/handgun-length barrels. Out of such barrels the round is a small-game getter, suited to animals as large as called fox and coyote. It should also be great on a treed cat like lion, since such shooting is under controlled conditions with known (and limited) ranges.

Still, the booming .30's bark is far worse than its bite out of the shorter barrels. I remember well attempting to

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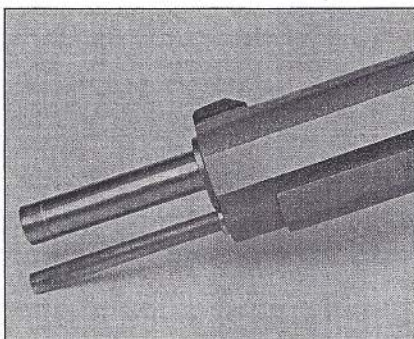
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Rear view of the slide of the new Automag III (above) shows familiar 1911-type styling and fully-adjustable Millet rear sight.

slings "10s" in the local indoor range 15 years ago or so with my trusty Model 41 Smith when a "neighboring" shooter touched off a Blackhawk chambered in .30 Carbine. Wow! There was a ball of fire from the muzzle that must have reached out a foot or more as the 110-grain projectile burst on the scene, and dust drifted down from the ceiling from the reverberations that followed. The shooting buddy grinned a sheepish grin and cocked the single-action for another shot as I decided to watch rather than get back to my attempts at "10s." It would have been futile to do otherwise. I'm sure that old .30 is still blasting merrily away, hopefully not on a local indoor range somewhere.

Last year, while visiting with Harry Sanford and Larry Grossman at the 1989 SHOT Show, I learned that they had fired up a new company dubbed IAI, or Irwindale Arms Incorporated, located at 6226 Santos Diaz in Irwindale, CA 91702. The new plant would be producing a new Auto Mag III chambered for the potent little .30 Carbine round first, to be followed with big-bore semi-autos chambered for 9mm Mag and .45 Winchester Mag. The .30 looked like a winner, so Harry fixed me up with a very early production model with 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch barrel—the only current production length. I've been playing with the semi-auto .30 caliber for about six months now. I carried the gun on a recent lion hunt in Idaho, but master cat hunter Harvey Whitten and I were unsuccessful in finding any tracks in the sparse Idaho snow that would lead the dogs to a shootable cat. This was my second hunt with the Riggins, Idaho-based expert, and the score is thus far writer 1 (back in 1981) and lions 1.



The long .30-caliber barrel of the Automag III (above) extends forward from the front of the slide and is matched with a similar-length recoil spring guide rod.



The extractor of the Automag III is a hefty chunk of stainless steel. It's mounted on the exterior of the slide. Spring tension comes from a little coil spring for positive action.



The Automag III field strips quickly with no tools, using a procedure which is almost the same as that used in the 1911-style guns. It is constructed almost entirely from high-quality stainless steel. Note that the barrel does not have a pivoting link to achieve the lockup, but rather a kidney-shaped cam recess.

I'll go back again.

At any rate, the IAI .30 Carbine semi-auto will be thumping around for quite some time, unless I miss my guess. The 17-4 stainless steel gem is a pleasure to shoot, with minimal recoil and adequate punch for hunting small and medium game or self-defense. This .30 is one of the least fussy semi-autos that I've worked with, and I'm betting that it would even feed and shoot cast semi-wadcutters based on Keith's design, if such moulds existed. I've run hundreds of rounds through this early gun with nary a hitch, even when I ran pressures up sky-high with evidently too much of Accurate Arms' No. 5 powder behind Speer's 100-grain Plinker. Flattened primers and hot feelings were accompanied with the only cases of balky extraction that I have thus far encountered.

The IAI .30 measures 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches in length and stands just a hair over 5 inches "tall." It weighs 43 ounces empty. The Auto Mag III is constructed almost entirely of 17-4 stainless steel, as I said earlier, with the exceptions being the barrel, which is constructed of 416 stainless steel, and the sear, which is constructed of A-2 tool steel. The III features the familiar grip angle of the 1911 Colt, with operational features that match. The III is a recoil-operated semi-automatic based on the Browning design. In other words, the barrel and slide recoil to the rear before the two are unlocked, after which the slide continues rearward to extract/eject the

AUTOMAG III

empty and pick up a fresh round from the eight-round magazine. The rear of the barrel is cammed downward to unlock from the slide by an elongated and angled hole in the barrel's lower rear tab, through which protrudes the take-down pin rather than the rotating link familiar to 1911 owners.

The Browning design lends itself well to function, and while such designs can be built to very strict accuracy standards, such is not quite so often the case with out-of-the-box automatics. I've seen such guns exhibit great difficulty just staying on the paper at 25 yards, even if the "paper" is quit large. This all happens because the barrel is *not* attached directly to the sighting apparatus. If the barrel simply *floats* from one location in the rig to another, accuracy suffers, to say the least. Hopefully, your semi-automatic barrel floats from one position to another less than other examples.

At any rate, the boys and girls at IAI have managed to keep the barrel of the III moving less, and while my early gun displayed less than tack-driving accuracy, recent conversations with Larry Grossman lead me to believe that the current production guns are doing even better than mine in the accuracy department. Larry reports that they are finding ways to locate the barrel more positively now, and he's offered to bring my "old" one up to "specs." What do they hope for? Larry says that they'd like to see every Auto Mag III that leaves the plant shoot into 2½-3 inches at 25 yards. That's a reasonable goal in my book. The gun retails for \$674, so it ought to do that well, too. I expect that 2½ inches or so will be little problem for the III either, since I hit one load that accounted for 10 rounds nearly as tight, and the breech of my barrel does move around a bit from shot to shot.

The fit and finish of the III is top rate, and the gun feels quite nice in my average hands, although I'm likewise thankful that the .30 Carbine case isn't, say, 2 inches in length, either. The grip housing is plenty long, and the reach from rear of grip to trigger is a lengthy 3¼ inches. Small hands beware. Likewise, I have to completely shift my shooting hand to reach the thumb button that releases the magazine. Fortunately, the button is in the proper "1911" position. The safety is also in the right place, although this one recoils with the slide, so you can't wisely rest your thumb on it during shooting sessions, either. If you do, you'll have a very sore thumb. When activated, the safety completely blocks hammer-to-



The magazine of the new Automag III holds a full 8 rounds of .30 Carbine ammo. Author had some problems with handloads.

firing-pin contact, and it blocks the firing pin as well.

The grips are a black plastic that looks right on the stainless gun. Also right on a gun of this type are the easily

seen black ramp sight and the adjustable blade rear sight. The sight radius is just over 9 inches on the III, and the adjustments of the rear sight allow one to quickly bring the gun into the "10"

AMT AUTO MAG III LOADING INFORMATION

LOAD	VELOCITY AT 15 FT. (FPS)	EXTREME SPREAD (FPS)	STD. DEV. (FPS)	10-SHOT GROUP AT 25 YARDS	COMMENTS
FEDERAL AMERICAN EAGLE 110 FMJs	1,594	55	22	4.28-IN. AVG.	PERFECT FUNCT.
FEDERAL 110-GRAIN JHPs (#30CA)	1,654	61	23	5.89-IN. AVG.	PERFECT FUNCT.
SPEER 100-GRAIN PLINKER 16.5 GRAINS ACCURATE ARMS 1680 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,406	80	31	4.84-IN. AVG.	PERFECT FUNCT.
SPEER 100-GRAIN PLINKER 7.5 GRAINS ACCURATE ARMS #5 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,480	30	9	2.87-IN. AVG.	POOR EXTRACTION IND. HIGH PRESS.
SPEER 100-GRAIN PLINKER 12.5 GRAINS HERCULES 2400 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,522	113	31	6.28-IN. AVG.	
SPEER 100-GRAIN PLINKER 15 GRAINS WW 296 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,528	136	42	5.56-IN. AVG.	
SPEER 110-GRAIN JHP 7.5 GRAINS ACCURATE ARMS #5 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,360	43	13	3.25-IN. AVG.	
SPEER 110-GRAIN JHP 16.5 GRAINS ACCURATE ARMS #1680 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,365	52	15	4.93-IN. AVG.	
SPEER 110-GRAIN JHP 7.5 GRAINS HERCULES UNIQUE CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,354	97	30	4.37-IN. AVG.	
SPEER 110-GRAIN JHP 15 GRAINS WW 296 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,588	54	14	4.37-IN. AVG.	
SPEER 110-GRAIN JHP 12.5 GRAINS HERCULES 2400 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,492	73	25	5.50-IN. AVG.	
SPEER 110-GRAIN RN SP 12.5 GRAINS HERCULES 2400 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,471	108	27	5.25-IN. AVG.	
SPEER 110-GRAIN RN SP 15 GRAINS WW 296 CCI 500 PRIMERS	1,529	103	34	5.78-IN. AVG.	

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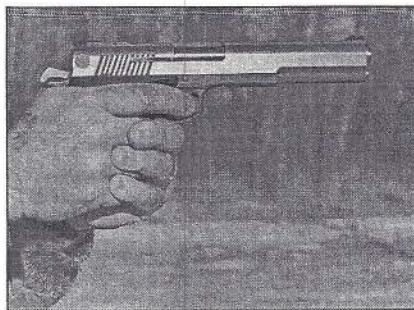
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The author's wife shot the sequence on this page. The photo above shows the gun just as he pulls the trigger.

ring, if that's the goal. The rear sight is adjustable with normal screwdrivers for windage and elevation, and while clicks were easily felt and heard for elevation, windage clicks were nonexistent for some reason. No matter, adjustments were quick and precise.

The trigger of my sample breaks at a relatively clean $4\frac{1}{2}$ pounds. The trigger action is far better than that normally encountered on any semi-auto that I've seen. My hat is off to IAI for this one.

Takedown of the III is similar to that of a 1911. After verifying that the gun is empty, one pulls the slide about 1 inch to the rear, then pushes the slide stop out to the left. This will allow the slide/barrel group to move forward off the receiver. To get the barrel out of the slide, one depresses the spring-loaded recoil-rod bushing, which allows rotation of the barrel bushing about 45° and removal of bushing, recoil rod, and spring. The barrel is then easily removed from the slide. Routine cleaning and maintenance demands no further disassembly, and none is advised. Reversal of the above procedure should result in a functional arm once again.

What exactly does a .30 Carbine round do from $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches of pistol barrel? First off, you can easily coax a 110-grain round-nose projectile up to 1,600 fps and more from this gem, and that equates to over 600 foot-pounds of muzzle energy. Yep, the hot .30 lives right in .357 land, up close. In a defensive situation, I would bet that the .30 Carbine shooter would come out on top. While the .30 would do fine in a fight, I'm sure that muzzle flash would be a bit disconcerting in night games, to say the least. I doubt if you could accurately follow up without allowing your eyes to readjust after each shot.

The Auto Mag III is even more practical in the field than it is for defensive work. It's a hunter's gun, pure and simple. It would be great fun where rabbits explode under your feet, and, likewise, it'll do perfectly well on called fox and coyote to 25 yards or so, or as far as

you can accurately place projectiles on such critters. In fact, if ever our drought breaks and we get some fresh, clean snow, I'll take mine to work just so. Grab a call and the III and be ready for fast action.

The shooting performance is pretty well summed up in the accompanying chart. After my extensive shooting sessions, I'd bet money that Federal Cartridge Corporation is loading their .30s



BLAM! As the gun fires, the slide recoils, cocking the hammer. So far, there's not much muzzle rise, but...



with Winchester 296 or Hodgdon's H110 powder. Their factory ammo "flashes" and sounds just like my 296 loads. You'll note that the .30 Auto Mag III shoots just fine with most ammo. Be advised, too, that if you're going to be standing *anywhere* even remotely close to an active .30 Carbine pistol, wear lots of hearing protection.

The only other-than-perfect marks of this extensive test go first to the continuing drought that prevented treeing a large mountain lion, which would

have been cleanly harvested with one round from the IAI Auto Mag III and a Federal 110-grain JHP load. Such is hunting. The second less-than-perfect mark goes to the sample gun. Routinely, I'd have 7, 8, or even 9 rounds downrange in satisfactory fashion, only to get a next shot that would slip about 4 inches left and 6 inches low. Then the gun would get right back with it. If one was holding the rig one-handed, NRA Bullseye style, one might assume that a jerk had occurred. Still, when the gun is supported rather solidly in an Outers Pistol Perch on a very solid bench, such is not the case. Further examination proved that in fact the breech end of the barrel would routinely move around quite a bit within the slide—enough to account for the group openers. That's the problem that IAI has since eliminated. Obviously, they couldn't do much about the first problem. Precipitation is not in their line of work, it seems.

All in all, I'd say that the .30 Carbine is a great little cartridge, and fortunate-

...the final shot in the series shows the pistol in full recoil, with the case well clear of the ejection port.

ly it just got a bit better with the introduction of IAI's Auto Mag III. It seems that the old Auto Mag did indeed get a great ball rolling, and shooters are just that much better off. When I head out after mountain lion, this Auto Mag III will just be very handy in case we tree a great cat. Stay tuned. ●