

**Product review**

# Author likes TDE 'Back Up' .380 auto

By George C. Nonte Jr.  
Associate Editor

In years gone by, when there were a couple very nice pocket-type .380 autos made in this country (Colt and Remington), most buyers opted for the smaller-caliber



Nonte

.32 ACP in the same gun. It would be hard to say why, but the much superior .380 cartridge ran a long second to the .32. All that began changing a dozen or so years ago when gun-toters began to realize that in the same size and weight gun they could get the bigger, heavier, and faster (thus much more effective) .380 at no greater cost and no reduction in handling ease.

By then, though, not a single, domestic maker produced a basic pocket pistol in .380 or .32. It was imports or nothing.

Now, though, the scene is changing. The latest domestic handgun we've checked is a basic, single-action .380 made by TDE (Auto Mag, remember) of stainless steel and named "Back Up." Designer Harry Sanford chose that name as an indicator of the design philosophy behind the gun and the primary use for which he intended it.

It's not meant as a primary weapon, but as a secondary arm for law-enforcement officers against the time when — for whatever reason — the service sidearm couldn't finish the ball.

### Stainless steel

Toward this end Sanford

The Back Up is composed of relatively few parts; exclusive of the six pins and six small springs, it is made up of the frame, trigger, trigger bar, sear, hammer, ejector, grip safety, manual safety, magazine catch, recoil spring and guide, slide, breech block, extractor, and firing pin.

### Two grips

Of course, there are two grips and a pair of screws to secure them, and a five-piece magazine. Autos with fewer parts are around, but they have less to offer than the Back Up.

Potential functioning problems have been designed out of this gun. The feed ramp is straight, presenting a single, smooth surface, and the chamber mouth is radiused all around; the magazine is sturdy and easily disassembled for cleaning; the breech face and extractor are more accessible for cleaning than any other design; and the extractor claw is unusually sturdy for so small a gun.

In addition, the enclosed hammer design reduces dirt-ingesting orifices to the barest minimum — an important factor in a gun to be carried concealed.

The gun's most unusual feature is its separate breech block pinned into the slide. The block carries the firing pin and extractor; the latter retains the firing pin and is in turn held by a single, loose pin.

### Too often

All too often extractors are difficult to remove and so their recesses are seldom cleaned until the accumulated crud causes a malfunction. When the block is in place, the extractor pin is

spring-detented pin merely positions the block in the slide and is not heavily stressed. The breech block also serves to retain the slide in the frame, and its removal is the first major step in disassembly.

Separate breech blocks aren't

new, as any Remington M51 owner knows, but the application here is unique.

The frame, like the slide body, is a single, finish-machined, stainless-steel casting. It, too, shows imaginative engineering. For example, there is no separate

retaining device for the sliding trigger; the trigger bar holds it and is in turn held by the right grip.

### Rotating hammer

The rotating hammer is slotted (Please Turn to Page 7)



from corrosive perspiration acids and dirt. And, to facilitate the concealment required for a second gun, it was made as small as possible and with as few protrusions as possible.

The result is a bare five inches long, 3.655 inches high, .925 of-an-inch wide over its smooth, wood grips, and weighs only 17 ounces unloaded. Stoking it with five .380 cartridges in the magazine and one in the chamber boosts the carrying weight a tad to 19 ounces.

This makes it the smallest .380 available, smaller even than the pre-1968 Star Starlet and Walther PPK. Being of all-steel construction, it feels heavier than it is because of its small size.

a paper clip, or even a toothpick.

The block is aligned in the slide by vertical ribs in both, which absorb all firing stresses. A tightly

here the serrations on top of the separate breech block may be clearly seen, and the breech block retaining pin is visible above the upper left corner of the finger serrations on the slide. The manual safety

is shown in the "fire" position and the protruding grip safety indicates the hammer is cocked. (Photos by George C. Nonte Jr.)

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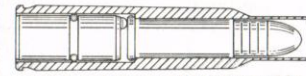
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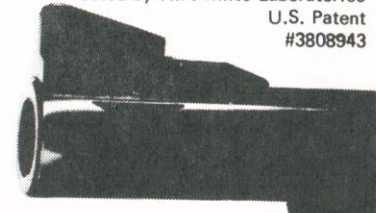
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**Handguns & Rifles**

## .380 auto review . . .

(Continued From Page 6)

to straddle the fixed ejector, both being held by the hammer pin. The mainspring also drives the magazine catch, and the manual safety pin also secures the grip safety. The balance of the lockwork is conventional and simple.

In over 300 rounds of assorted ammunition, including high-performance factory and handloads, we've encountered no functional problems. Neither have any accuracy shortcomings been noted, keeping in mind that this is strictly a point-and-shoot gun equipped with only rudimentary, fixed sights.

Handling and pointing is good, considering the Back Up's abbreviated size and weight. For me, it points a hair low at bar-length range, and at 17 ounces it does jump around a bit. Unless one has very small hands, the short butt offers only a two-finger grip.

A Beretta-style, finger spur integral with the magazine bottom piece provides a seat for the third finger if your hand isn't too beefy. A ham-handed individual would be better off amputating the spur and curling his spare fingers under the butt.

### Charged magazine

There is no slide latch, so loading means you insert a charged magazine, draw back and let go the slide to chamber the top round, then engage the manual safety. After that, another round can be placed in the magazine if you want the full six shots possible.

In fact, the magazine of our sample gun will hold six rounds, but there's no spring compression left, so it can't be seated in the gun. Another 1/16-of-an-inch of follower travel would accom-

modate that sixth round, giving the fully-charged gun seven shots.

The manual safety can be disengaged easily on the draw, and the grip safety doesn't get in the way. In fact, I'm not conscious of it at all when pulling the little guns. Functioning of both safeties is independent and very positive. They block the sear solidly in the hammer cock notch to prevent firing from any cause.

### Disassembly easy

Disassembly is quite easy once you know how, but different from other guns. First, chamber empty, magazine out, hammer cocked (safety position doesn't matter); use a 7/64-of-an-inch or smaller drift and hammer to start the breech block pin from the left to the right; once the pin is past its snap-ring, push it on out; use a pencil or dowel through the magazine well to push the breech block out the top of the slide (retracting the slide 1/16-1/8-of-an-inch may allow the block to simply fall out if the gun is inverted); with a long, slender rod or screwdriver, reach back inside the slide and press down on the hammer, and thumb the slide forward over the hammer; lift up the rear of the slide and move it forward off the barrel.

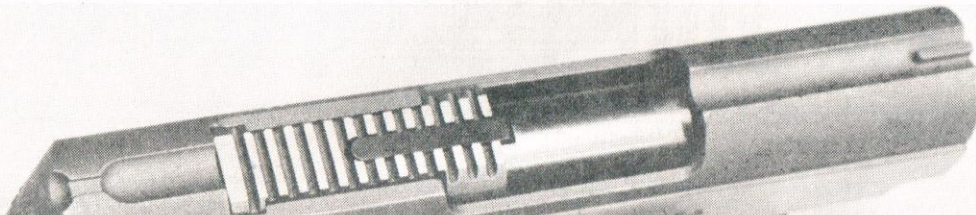
The rest is about like any other pocket auto — but don't try to remove the barrel, it's welded in place to stay.

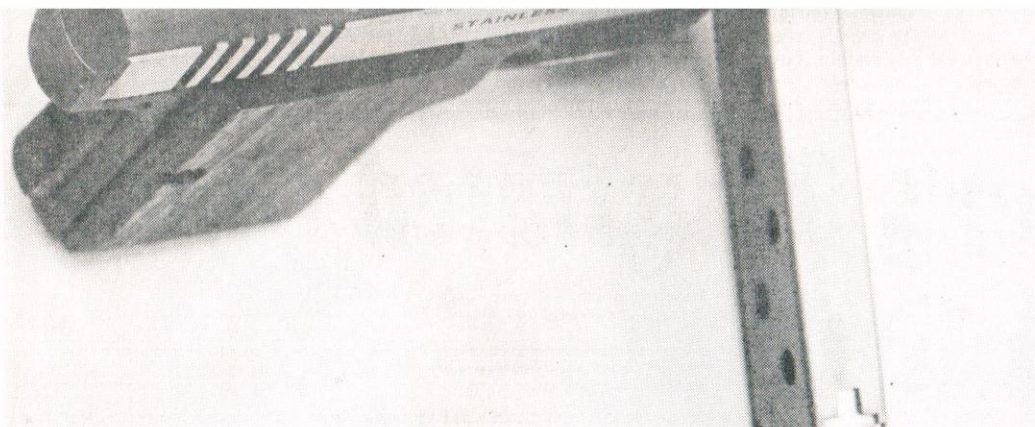
Except for the top of the breech block, slide side flats, and trigger (all polished bright), the gun is a

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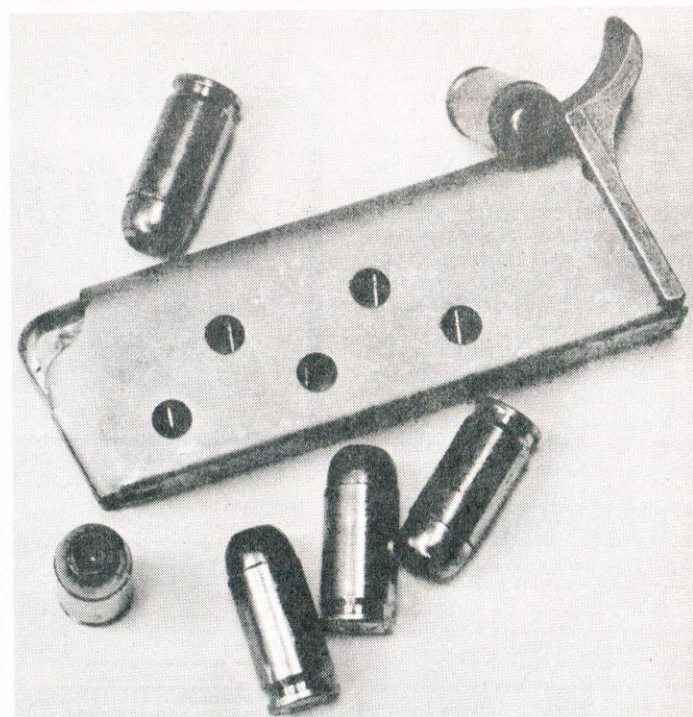
Shown here from the right side, the salient features of the new TDE "Back Up" .380 pocket autoloader are clearly seen. The all stainless exterior is bead blasted to a pleasing matte-grey finish except for the sides of the trigger and the slide flats; the large grip safety pops out to this extent when the hammer is cocked. Grips are smooth-finish walnut nicely inlaid and secured by socket-head screws. The butt-secured magazine carries a curved extension base for additional finger purchase.





The "Back Up" sights are rudimentary and fully recessed in a groove in the top of the slide to avoid any unnecessary protrusions. Note also the outline of the removable breech block which transferred all of

its firing loads to the slide by means of the lugs visible. The retaining pin is therefore not subjected to load or impact and serves only to position the block in the slide.



The magazine, too, is made entirely of stainless steel. The six, S&W, 84-grain, JHP, .380 cartridges shown here constitute a full load for the sample gun—five in the magazine and one in the chamber.

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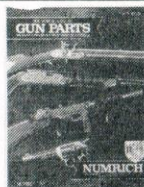
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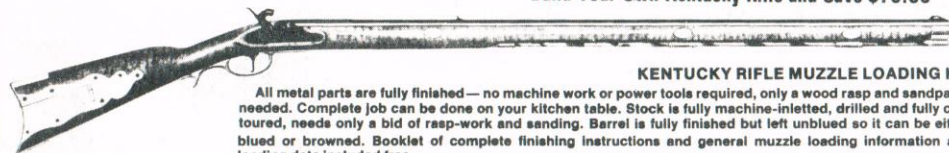
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## Smoothness in .380 . . .

(Continued From Page 7)

neutral, matte grey produced by sandblasting the stainless steel. A very serviceable finish, if not gaudy. If I were to carry this gun in my waistband as many will do, I'd prefer the sides of the slide to be sandblasted too; less likelihood of the gun slipping through to clatter embarrassingly across the floor.

### Workmanship good

Workmanship on our sample gun is good, from a functional if not aesthetic view. Some casting marks are visible, and there are a

few tiny bubble marks.

There is smoothness and tightness where there should be, and where it won't matter, some roughness and looseness is found. The trigger pull is heavy, at nine pounds, but I wouldn't want a 3½-pound trigger pull on a tiny pocket gun, would you?

At \$157.50, the Back Up by TDE is a good choice where concealment and power are both needed. I like it.