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MARCH 1993

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■ COLT 9MM CARBINE ■ CALICO M900 9MM
■ MARLIN CAMP CARBINE 9MM

\$2.95

\$3.50 in Canada

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Gun Test

NEW A.M.T. BACK-UP .380

**It's double
action only!**

By Dan Branscome

I have carried an A.M.T. Back-Up in .380 ACP as my backup weapon for the past ten years. Like thousands of others, I was pleased to have six .380's in a package the size of a .25, and in stainless steel to boot. It was perfectly named as the "Back-Up".

I was trained (and trained others) that ideally the backup weapon should be the same in type and operation as the primary weapon, to maximize familiarity under stress. Even more ideal is to have compatibility of caliber. Because my duty weapon is a 1911 pattern .45, and because truly compact .45's are rare and expensive, (ie. Semmerling, La France) the Back-Up was as close as reality (my budget) allowed. A single action, semi-



**Author carries his Back-Up with
Glaser in chamber and Federal 90gr.
Hydra-Shoks in magazine.**

automatic with a grip safety and a manual safety thumbed "down." All I sacrificed was compatibility (and power) of cartridge.

Many disregard the concept of the "ideal" backup, and carry some form of 2" revolver, even though their primary weapon is an auto. I can't argue with the idea of five .38 SP + P's "for sure", even from a coat pocket.

I am sure that others agree, when I say that I never felt totally comfortable carrying a cocked and locked semi-auto in an ankle holster, grip safety and all. I know that feeling is shared, because for the past ten years customers have asked Harry Sanford at A.M.T. for a double action Back-Up. In response to those requests, the DAO Back-Up is now on dealer's shelves.

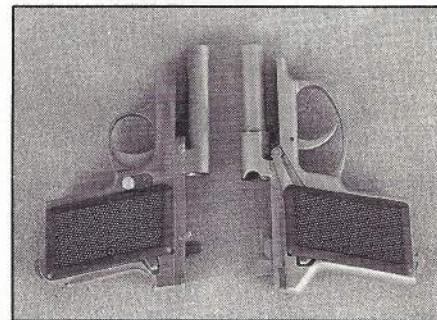
TOTALLY NEW DESIGN

When I began this article, I planned a simple comparison of the S/A and DAO Back-Up. As soon as I had my hands on the sample, I realized that I wasn't looking at a Back-Up modified to double action only operation, but an entirely new design. Larry Grossmann, General Man-

ager and head of Engineering for A.M.T., has managed to completely redesign the Back-Up, without changing the major dimensions in the slightest.

HOW THEY COMPARE

Both models of the Back-Up share a 2-1/2" barrel, and outside dimensions of 5" long, 3-3/4" high, and 1 1/16" wide. Both have stainless steel construction, black



**Frame/barrel assembly is solid weld on
both guns. DAO has a much larger hammer.**

carbon fiber grips, and European type magazine release.

The markings on the left side of the slide, "cal .380 9mm KURZ Back-Up", along with the A.M.T. logo and address are the same. On the right side "STAINLESS-MADE IN U.S.A." is overwhelmed by "WARNING READ INSTRUCTIONS MANUAL BEFORE HANDLING THIS FIREARM". Said instruction manual is sprinkled with warnings and caution in red ink to placate the legal system we have in place of the justice system.

IMPROVEMENTS

The first change noticed is the substantially larger trigger guard, which not only

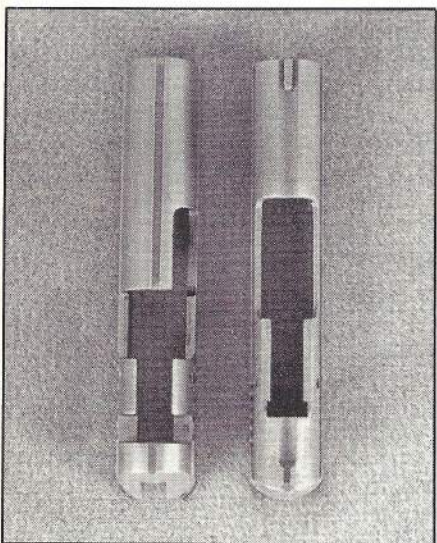


Comparison photo shows redesigned slide and scalloped cut at the rear of chamber for visual inspection. Also prominent is reshaped tang. S/A Backup carries magazine with finger hook extension.

allows for the travel of the D/A trigger but also allows much greater access to the trigger. The second difference is that the DAO Back-Up ejects from the side via an ejection port in the slide rather than the top ejection found on the S/A Back-Up. This increases reliability, and spares the shooter from stopping hot .380 brass with his or her forehead.



Rear view shows visible hammer of DAO and ergonomic tang.



Top view of sights show tunnel design of the DAO compared to the S/A. Rear sight is simplified, and the front sight eliminated.

Not so noticeable is the ergonomic elimination of the downward projection of the tang. While not painful, it was uncomfortable while shooting, and its elimination is a noticeable improvement. Of course, the DAO design eliminates the manual safety and grip safety, while retaining the same grip circumference (4-3/4") as the S/A with the grip safety depressed. Safety is provided by a totally enclosed (but visible) hammer which does not rest in contact with the inertia type firing pin. Factor tests have failed to

make the gun fire accidentally, and as Mas Ayoob so warns, double action only is an almost absolute defense against a claim of accidental or negligent discharge.

DISASSEMBLY

The DAO Back-Up continues the simplicity of the S/A. The breech block assembly is retained by the bolt retaining pin, which is removed with a 1/8" punch. Pull the slide back approximately 1/2", to free the firing pin and spring. The bolt is then driven from the slide with a brass or aluminum rod inserted through the magazine well. The slide is then moved forward to release it and the recoil assembly. The barrel is fixed by solid weld to the frame. I have disassembled the frame on the S/A Back-Up only occasionally, and would not recommend it with the DAO. Remember, gunsmiths love "basket cases."



Disassembly for cleaning is simple.

A.M.T. DAO BACK-UP

CALIBER: .380 ACP
LENGTH: 5"
WIDTH: 11/16"
HEIGHT: 3-3/4"
WEIGHT: 18 ounces
BBL: 2-1/2"
CAPACITY: 5 + 1
PRICE: \$285.95 W/2 MAGAZINES
MANUFACTURER:

ARCADIA MACHINE
 & TOOL, INC.
 6226 SANTOS DIAZ
 ST., Dept G&W
 IRVINDALE, CA
 91702

About the author: a private security professional who specializes in executive protection and training, he has previously appeared in "It Happened To Me" Apr/92 CH, as well as professional publications Management and the Journal of the American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers.

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HOW IT SHOOTS

I won't insult your good sense by giving you group sizes at 25 yards. Test firing of the DAO Back-Up was conducted as I carried and practiced with the S/A, with a Glaser Safety Slug up the pipe, and the magazine stoked with Federal 90gr. Hydra-Shoks, and C.C.I. Blazer 95 gr. TMJ for economy of practice. I fired as follows; with the results shown in the photos.

TARGET #1



Target #1—Point fire at 1, 3, & 7 yds. with premium ammo. Score: 353 out of 360 possible (Head scored as ten when designated as target)

1 YD. 6 RDS(X2) RAPID FIRE POINT/
1 HAND HEAD
3 YD. 6 RDS(X2) RAPID FIRE POINT/
2 HAND TRIPLES
7 YD. 6 RDS(X2) AIMED 2 HANDS
TRIPLES

TARGET #2

7 YD. 6 RDS(X2) AIMED 2
HANDS HEAD/CENTER
15 YD. 6 RDS(X2) AIMED
RESTED CENTER

I found the DAO Back-Up to point as naturally for me as the S/A. The manual says the trigger pull is approximately 8 lbs. The trigger pull on the sample gun felt slightly heavier than that, but was smooth and easily controlled. AMT has changed the trigger and hammer spring from those used in the first 500 guns made, because of complaints about the



Target #2—Aimed fire at 7 and 15 yds. Score: 232 out of 240 possible.

stiffness of the trigger pull. They will retrofit the new parts in those guns upon return to the factory.

The sights have also been redesigned. The fixed sights on the S/A Back-Up were excellent for a gun of its type, extremely accurate, although miniscule. The DAO has eliminated the front sight, and has a tunnel sight ala the Guttersnipe. It was fast to index, and produced adequate accuracy at 15 YDS.



The Finish of the DAO Back-Up is matte. Together with the grips you have a distinctive black and stainless look.

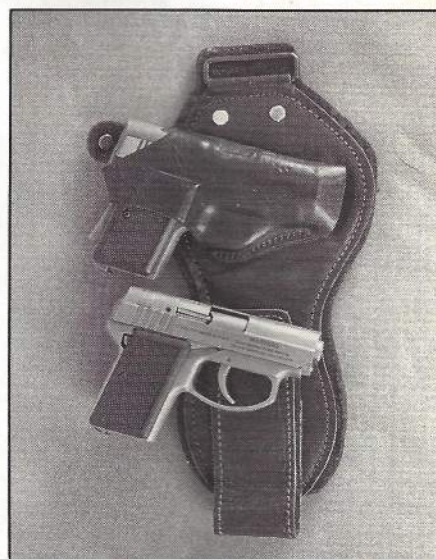
Functioning was perfect with one of the magazines provided, but the follower of the other magazine would literally hold the slide open, and failed to feed regularly. Both magazines have flat floorplates, which to my mind is a plus, because the finger hook variety provided with the S/A would "print through" when worn in an ankle holster, and required the purchase of "flat" magazines anyhow. The magazines for the S/A functioned 100% in the DAO gun.

As to holsters, the DAO trigger guard prevents carry in the Alessi ankle holster that was home for S/A. Shoemaker, Strong, and Galeo are offering holsters, with others sure to follow.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

I have been confused in recent years concerning whether the company is Arcadia Machine & Tool (A.M.T.), or Irwindale Armament Industries (I.A.I.). Accordingly, Katie Eoff of A.M.T. explained that the I.A.I. line of sporting pistols (Automag II, III, IV, V) had been absorbed by A.M.T. in June of 1990. What is in the A.M.T. name is quality and customer service. The finish of the DAO Back-Up is matte, both attractive and utilitarian. Finish is a bit rough in a few non-critical areas, but you have to look close. It has the distinctive black and stainless look of A.M.T. products.

When I purchased the S/A Back-Up, I experienced recurrent malfunctions, due to galling of the slide and frame. Returning the gun to the factory got a new slide fitted with perfect functioning to date. A replacement for the faulty magazine for the DAO was there for the asking.



DAO requires its own holster. Here it rides in an Alessi ankle rig.

IMPROVING ON PERFECTION

The S/A Back-Up is arguably the smallest gun made in this caliber in the USA. The DAO .380 Back-Up is certainly the smallest DAO .380 anywhere. For those fans of the Back-Up who asked for double action, or someone wanting an "ideal" back-up gun for a DAO auto, here it is.

My grandfather had recently asked me for a defense gun he could keep in his pocket, because of the increase of home invasion crimes in his area. He asked me for a .22. Both myself and my cousin (a Lt. with San Diego P.D.) recommended a 2" .38 Special. Grandpa's hands are twice as big as mine, and he suffers from arthritis in his hands. The small size, larger trigger guard, simple operation and more potent (than a .22) caliber made the A.M.T. DAO .380 Back-Up pictured here the answer to his needs, and our concerns. I wouldn't give my grandfather anything less than the best.