

guns review



Howard Dove: the finest American Gun Engraver
IAI Automag III 30M1 Pistol Reviewed

Lock Stock
and Barrel

Pistol
Reports

Save a
Hammer Gum

The Titan Manitou Air Rifle Tested



Automag III in 30 M1 Carbine, seen from the left.



The GUN REVIEW IAI Automag III in 30 Carbine.



The right side of the Automag III.

THE name Automag comes down to us from the early 1970s when the original was produced by Harry Sandford. It was a huge, gas operated gun chambered for its own 44 Automag cartridge and later offered in a necked down 357 chambering. Less than ten thousand of the guns were produced before it finally fell from the market place. But the name did not fall and we next saw Automag II, the .22 magnum pistol reviewed in this column in the January 1991 issue. Now we have the Automag III which is available in 30 M1 Carbine and 9mm Magnum. The Automag IV is on its way, chambered for the 10mm Magnum and 45 Winchester Magnum. But these Automags do not follow the costly gas operating system of the original. The Automag II, as we reported, has a retarded blowback system utilising holes in the chamber walls. The Automag III relies on the time tested Browning lock-up modified only slightly to take account of the very high pressures at which the gun is designed to operate.

Our test pistol was chambered for the 30 M1 carbine cartridge, which is immensely popular in the USA where vast numbers of the handy little M1 carbines have found their way into civilian hands. Until Mr Hurd's outrage against the shooting community, the M1 carbine was also popular in this country, but its banning by the 1988 Act changed all that. Still, many people must have been left with ammunition and loading dies on their hands. The ammunition is still available but demand is now very small. Although the M1 carbine is light and produces little recoil, its cartridge is far from a pipsqueek, operating at 30,000 psi chamber pressure and generating 2,000 feet per second in the carbine. Other pistols have been chambered for this round, including Ruger's Blackhawk revolver and the Contender single shot. Reports suggest that the factory cartridge wastes a good deal of its energy in shorter barrels, having been carefully designed to burn in the carbine barrel. Those reports, linked with some inconvenience in finding factory ammunition, caused us to go to handloading from the start.

The pistol itself is all stainless steel and whilst it is a handful, it is not by any means unwieldy or massive. It weighs a fraction under four pounds, is 10½" from muzzle to the end of the grip spur and 5" from the top of the slide to the bottom of the grip. The grip is 1¼" from side to side, and a large 2¼" from front to rear. That grip size is caused by the need to accommodate the magazine which holds cartridges which are 1.680" long. It will cause difficulties to those with very small hands, but we found it a positive advantage, compelling one to adopt a good grip in line with the bore of the gun. The grip plates are of a black plastic material, grooved horizontally with deep and comfortable grooves.

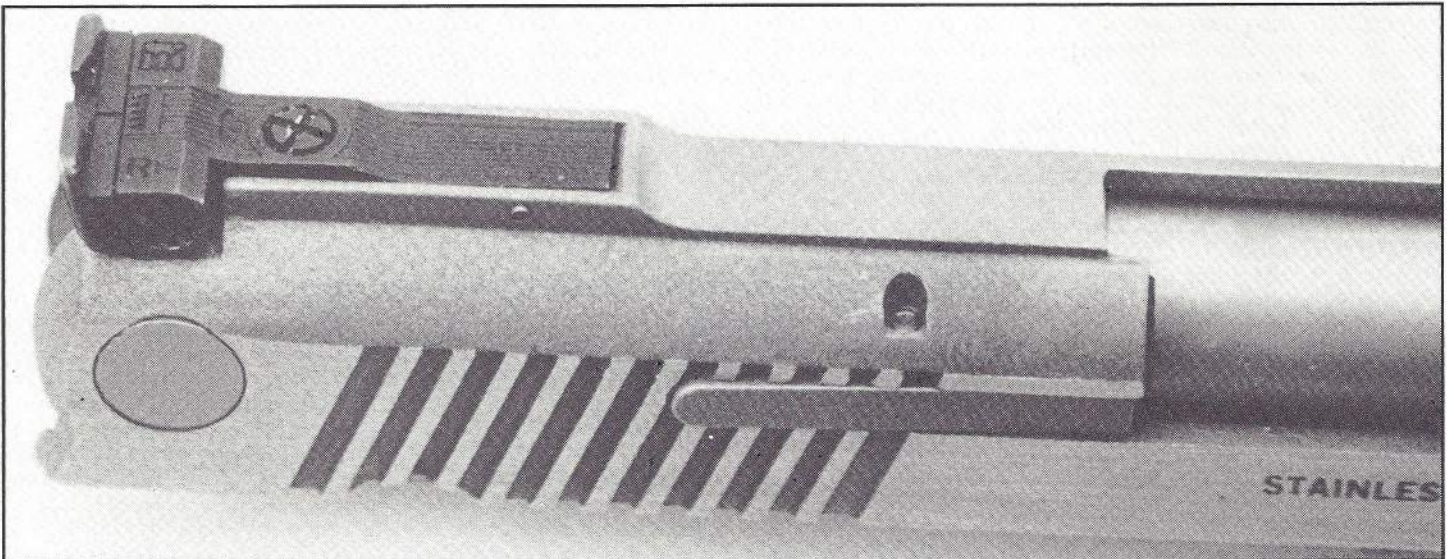
The pistol is single action only, with an external hammer which can be hand cocked. Trigger break was absolutely first class, clean and sharp at an ounce or so over three pounds and very consistent. The release felt much more like one pound than three and was the subject of comment from all who tried it. The safety is mounted on the left side of the slide at the rear. It needs either the weak hand or a break of the grip to apply it, but can be very conveniently released by the right thumb. The pistol has an inertia firing pin, just shorter than the breech block in which it operates. The safety



Automag III field stripped. The barrel delay plunger protrudes from the front of the recoil spring guide. Its spring, part CMiB, lurks unseen behind the plunger.

rotates a large steel block around the back of the firing pin and the hammer can be dropped in complete confidence when the gun is at safe. Rotating the safety also lifts the tail of the firing pin so that it is out of line with the firing pin hole and cannot penetrate if the gun is dropped.

Lock up is Browning with slight modification. The breech end of the exterior of the barrel is enlarged for just under two inches with a deep groove at the forward end. This gives two large lock-up faces which mate with the front of the ejection port and a groove in the top of the slide. A lug at the rear of the top of the barrel mates with a similar recess in the rear of the ejection port. The bulge at the muzzle runs in a barrel bushing as in the Colt style Brownings. The barrel was firmly locked when the gun was closed and runs back locked to the slide for the first part of the recoil until the bullet has left the barrel. As the slide runs back, the fixed barrel locking pin runs in the shaped hole in the lug beneath the barrel and, at the right time, the rear of the barrel drops, allowing the slide to go back on its own against the recoil spring. Everything fits very well and the gun worked faultlessly. The single column box magazine holds eight rounds and windows in the left side tell you how many are loaded. This is a large magazine in stainless



The Millet rear sight is a joy to use. Note also the large extractor on this pistol.

steel which has a plastics floor plate. The magazine release is a button at the top of the front left side of the grip. The feed groove in the rear of the barrel mates up with it very well and, though quite steep, worked faultlessly with not a single failure to feed through a very substantial number of rounds fired by the tester. The spring loaded extractor is mounted on the right of the slide and has a good grip area. Extraction was equally faultless.

The rearsight is a Millet sight with a deeply cut rear face, a square notch of a decent width and positive adjustment for both elevation and windage with the direction of movement clearly marked. This is used with a file cut forward sloping ramp foresight which gives a good Patridge style sight picture. We found sight adjustment easy to make and the sights very convenient to use.

The finish is matt stainless, casting obviously having been used throughout. The flats along the side of the slide are polished and the overall impression is very attractive. Fitting is all-important with any self loading pistol and shooting tests said all that needs to be said about the fitting on this gun.

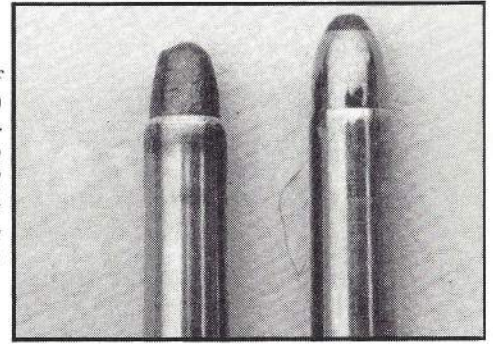
Stripping follows the Colt M1911 system. The slide is retracted an inch or so until the slide stop pin slips out through the hold-open slot in the left of the slide. The slide then runs off forward with the barrel, bushing, recoil spring and guide all in place. Depressing the front recoil spring bushing allows the barrel bushing to turn and it, the front spring bushing and recoil spring slip off the front of the slide. The recoil spring guide slips out towards the rear and the barrel comes out through the front of the frame.

But there is another little part. In the centre of the rear of the recoil spring guide is the barrel delay plunger and barrel delay plunger spring, parts CM11A and CM11B. These are vital to the operation of the gun. Springs on firearms have their own existence. They are difficult things to master and have a facility for flying off the gun at the wrong time, in the wrong direction and landing in an area where they are hard to find. But part CM11B is a spring of a different character. Though made of steel, it has the ability to become non-ferrous and so cannot be found by a magnet. It is a small spring, a mere 0.12" diameter and 0.45" long when uncompressed. It lies deep in a channel in the guide with the steel plunger ahead of it. And it lies there plotting and planning. It has a brain and it has the ability to move. It can lie quietly in one place and then, when a searcher approaches, it can move to some place which has already been searched. On the first stripping of the gun, this spring showed its mettle (no pun intended). It lay quietly within its recess — you wouldn't even know it was there. Long after the guide had been removed from the gun, it suddenly popped the plunger out, onto the floor, remaining well inside the recess itself. The plunger more or less followed the rules of physics and fell amongst a number of things on the floor. It was fairly easily recovered and received the epithets which were in fact due to part CM11B.

That first trick was merely to convince a gullible tester that the spring itself was a well behaved component and it was the plunger that needed watching. On the next stripping, things were quite different. The lesson had not been well enough learned and the guide was placed on the bench with the plunger still in place. Suddenly, there was a tinkling sound as the plunger contacted a metal part before hitting the floor. Whilst attention was diverted by the sound of the plunger and the unprintable words that followed, part CM11B slipped out of its deep recess. The plunger was easily found but CM11B wasn't there and the plunger simply slipped lifelessly to the bottom of its well.

All the laws of logic and physics pointed the direction in which CM11B would be found. First the bench top was searched; then the area immediately in line; then the search was extended and extended. Things were moved which have not been moved for years. Things were found which had been lost for years, but CM11B remained at large. Finally, there was just one option. The waste bin which had not been emptied quite as often as it might. It contained the products of cleaning a number of guns; patches soaked in solvent and patches which, though dirty were more or less dry. There were spent primers. There was a good spread of tumbling media swept from the floor after a mishap. There were a few damaged cases of various calibres. Nothing really nasty, of course, but it was all rather messy. And Part CM11B is small — very small. A fresh container had to be found and the contents of the bin removed bit by bit. At the end of it all CM11B was still missing. It was beginning to look as if it would be necessary to plead with the supplier, possibly returning the gun with CM11B still missing. Further words were said and the towelling mat on the bench, upon which parts of guns are spread during stripping was straightened before re-assembling the pistol.

The cartridges tested. Top, 12.5 grains of 2400 behind a 100 grain Speer Plinker bullet and below, 12 grains of 1400 behind a 110 grain soft point RelCom bullet. The former proved a superb load.



And there it was. That spring had crawled under the edge of that mat *after* the bench had been searched. There is evidence which would be given on oath to prove that the spring was not there when the bench was searched. When it realised that part of the search was over, it slipped back onto the bench and hid.

In a nutshell, one might say, watch out for the barrel delay plunger and spring when stripping the gun! That apart, the gun is easy to strip and clean.

The question of ammunition was given careful thought. The gun is made to handle factory M1 carbine loads but excessive muzzle flash indicates wasted energy. The agent for IAI pistol is Tim Hannam, The Granary, Wakefield Road, Swillington, Leeds, LS26 8UA (0532862175) who is also agent for Lee reloading products and handles components. He supplied his own RelCom cases and a set of Lee dies which were installed in a turret for use in a Lee press. The Lee turret system saves a great deal of time in die adjustment when changes in calibre have to be made. Also supplied was the Lee Taper crimp die for the M1. This latter die gives a much better crimp for automatic pistol cartridges, which headspace on the front of the case. Also supplied were some 110 grain soft point bullets which are the correct weight for the M1 Carbine. On hand we had some 100 grain 30 calibre Speer Plinkers, a half jacketed bullet which has performed well in a wide range of weapons.

We wanted a load which would operate the pistol but not waste energy and so started with 5.5 grains of Unique behind the 100 grain bullet. That was certainly well beneath the dignity of this pistol which simply refused to operate with anything so foppish. Upping the load with Unique produced better results but by the time we were approaching the sort of velocity we were seeking, there were signs of high pressure. We changed to 2400, a slower burning powder which should be capable of generating the velocity we wanted in the 6¼" barrel without raising pressures too high. After some experimenting, we ended up with 12.5 grains of 2400 behind the 100 grain Speer Plinker and 12 grains behind the 110 grain bullet. The latter was falling below the velocities we wanted, but the former load was just a touch under 1700 feet per second which was our intended result.

Throughout those albeit limited tests, we got better results with a 100 grain bullet and so stayed with that without developing loads for the 110 grain bullet any further. Consistency and accuracy were very much better with our selected load and we did not divert our attention from a winner. At an average of 1660 fps, the 100 grain bullet was moving along, but recoil was perfectly comfortable. There was a considerable amount of noise and muzzle blast and, on an indoor range, the muzzle flash was very noticeable; indeed, it was a little off-putting for the first few shots and it was necessary to work on the task of ignoring it.

But when it was ignored, the standard of accuracy was remarkable for a pistol of this sort. The sights were quickly and easily regulated for twenty yards and a card shot in front of witnesses, five rounds at a time. The first five rounds gave three tens and two very close nines. The second five went 10, 9, 10, 10 — 7! That last shot had nothing to do with the gun or ammunition either. Performance was at the top of the shooter's capacity and the gun will unquestionably put all shots in the ten ring of 20 yard or 25 metre targets. With a hot load like the one in use, that is good shooting. The velocity means that the load will be a flat shooter and point of aim will vary little at longer ranges.

Overall, then, an extremely handy, comfortable and accurate gun to handle what is, for a pistol, quite a hot load. We enjoyed testing it. It attracted a lot of attention on the range. The noise and flash alone ensured that everyone noticed it, but its qualities were universally acknowledged.

The IAI Automag III in 30M1 Carbine or 9mm Magnum will retail at £527.00 from Tim Hannam.