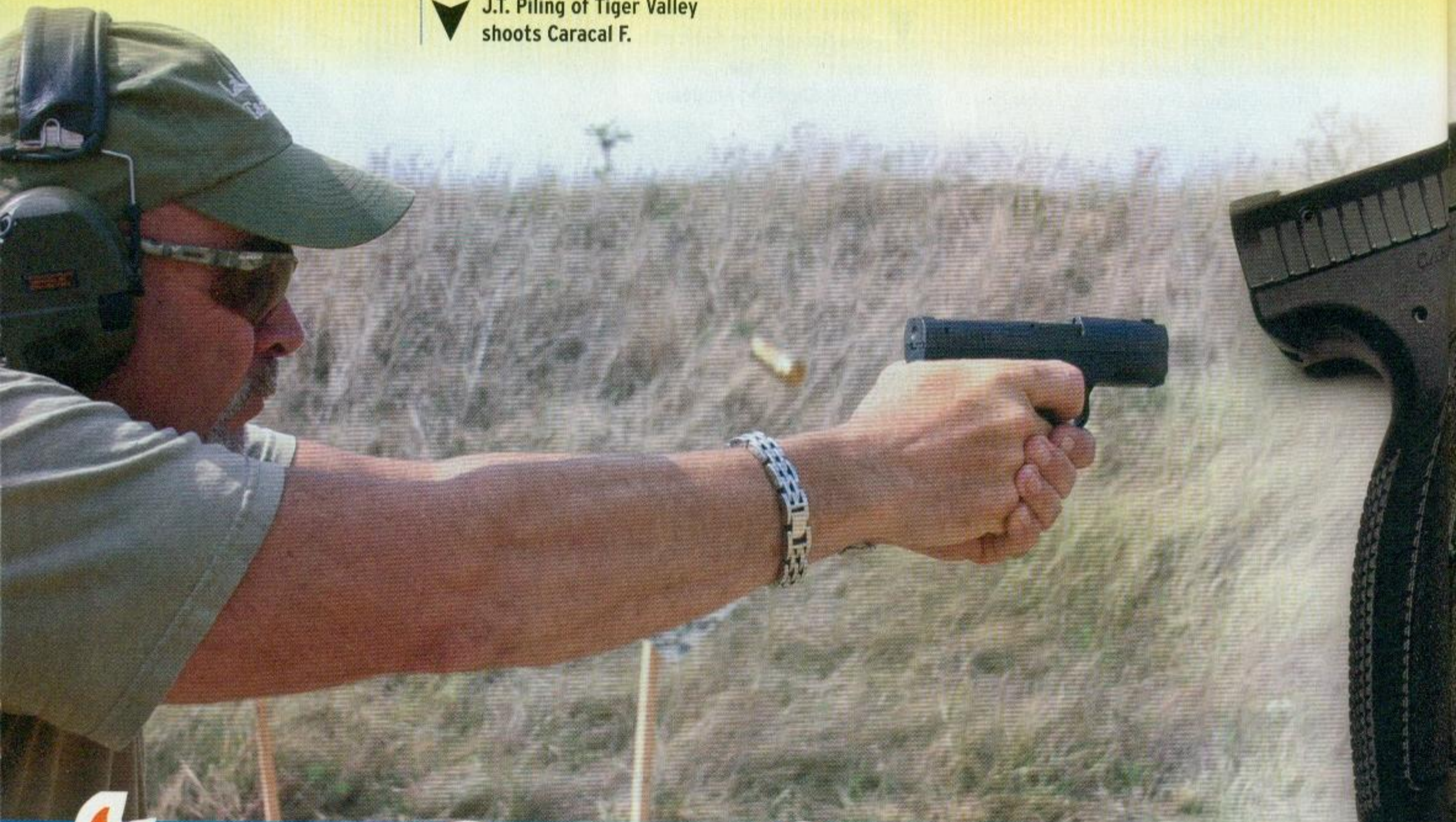


▼ J.T. Piling of Tiger Valley
shoots Caracal F.



ISLAMAGUN

CARACAL 9MM PISTOL

► BY ED LAWRENCE ► PHOTOS BY JESSIE INDRACUSIN

When we think of the United Arab Emirates in regard to arms, multi-billion dollar purchases of sophisticated weapon systems like F-16 fighters or Le Clerc tanks usually come to mind.

But since 2006, the UAE has undertaken its own production of a weapon, a striker-fired 9mm pistol named the Caracal.

The Caracal derives its name from an animal also known as the Persian or African Lynx. While the gun is expected to be available later in .40 S&W and .357 Sig, it currently only comes in 9mm.

The UAE armed forces, as well as those of Bahrain and Jordan, have adopted the Caracal. It has seen testing in Germany, where it complied with

NATO's D14 standard, the German Federal Police Standards, and the German Federal Armed Forces Technical Purchasing requirements. The gun has also been introduced to Europe and is now being imported into the United States by Caracal USA, a company formed specifically for this task.

CARACAL SPECS

The pistol employs a metal slide and polymer frame with embedded metal slide rails designed to be as long as pos-

sible to provide maximum stability and minimize frame flex during recoil. The gun is composed of a total of 32 parts.

Two models of the Caracal are being imported into the U.S.: the full-size or Caracal F, and the compact, designated the Caracal C. The full-sized gun has an overall length of 7" with a 4.09" barrel and a magazine capacity of 18 rounds. The compact measures 6.57" overall with a 3.66" barrel and holds 15 rounds. The larger Caracal's magazine can be used in the smaller version. Both guns have a suggested retail price of \$625, but will likely sell for less.

The company also manufactures a subcompact version with an overall length of 6.3" with a 3.46" barrel. Currently this version is unable to amass

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Full-sized Caracal F (top) and compact Caracal C.



Rear view of Caracal C's Quick See sights with tritium dot front sight installed by Amerigun.



enough points to qualify for importation into the U.S. However, Caracal USA is working hard to modify the gun in order to allow it to be imported, providing that the changes do not affect function or concealability.

Designed by Wilhelm Bubits of Austria, the Caracal project dates back to 2002. Bubits previously designed the Steyr M and S series of pistols. A former police officer, Bubits worked for Glock before he teamed with Steyr to have them produce his own handgun designs.

The Caracal's unique outline is reminiscent of the Steyr M, which itself bears some similarities to the Glock, specifically a trigger with a built-in safety similar to the Glock's Safe-Action trigger. As well as the safety in the trigger, the

Caracal also has two internal safeties: a drop safety and a firing pin safety. The gun's disassembly procedure is similar to a Glock's.

The lines of the Caracal's slide and grip are rounder than that of the Steyr or Glock, while the gun's rear backstrap, with its high grip, resembles that of the H&K P-7. This high rear grip, along with the gun's low bore axis, is designed to maximize controllability and minimize muzzle flip.

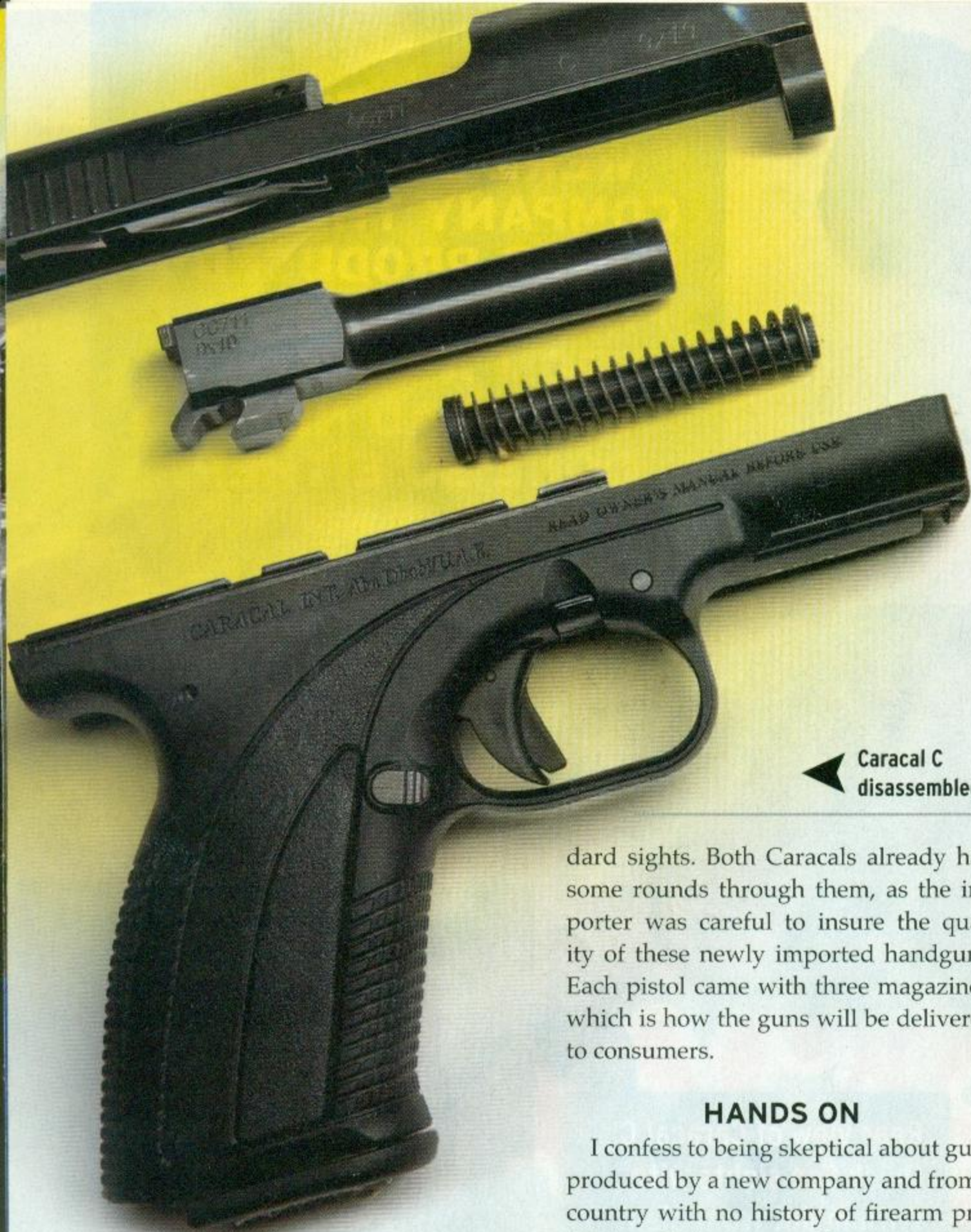
Another feature reminiscent of the H&K P-7 is the rear of the striker that protrudes from the backplate of the gun. If the gun is cocked, with or without a round in the chamber, the rear tip of the striker protrudes slightly into a button-sized indentation in the face of the back-

plate. This provides a visual and tactile verification that the gun is cocked, but since it protrudes into a hollow that surrounds it, it is protected even if the gun is dropped directly on the back of the slide.

As pressure is applied to the trigger and it moves backwards, more of the striker protrudes, similar to that of an H&K P-7, which does so as the front of the grip is squeezed, cocking the gun.

SIGHTS

Sights on the Caracal F consist of a white dot on the front post and a square rear notch with a single dot in the center bottom. While the front sight is set in a dovetail, the rear sight is machined into the rear striker assembly retain-



◀ Caracal C disassembled.

standard sights. Both Caracals already had some rounds through them, as the importer was careful to insure the quality of these newly imported handguns. Each pistol came with three magazines, which is how the guns will be delivered to consumers.

HANDS ON

I confess to being skeptical about guns produced by a new company and from a country with no history of firearm production. But as soon as the guns arrived, I was impressed with the quality and especially liked the way the compact version felt in my hands.

Both pistols feature texturing on their polymer grips to aid in grasping, and come standard with an integral rail on the frame to allow mounting of lights and similar devices. The manufacturer also has available a vertical foregrip that fits on the rail, as well as a removable stock that mates into a space between the magazine compartment and the back of the grip. However, using either of these features converts the gun into a short-barreled rifle, and it must be registered with BATFE before the importer will provide these accessories.

Regarding the Compact, I was especially doubtful when I first saw pictures of the Quick See sight system, but when I handled the gun, I took an instant liking to them. True to Caracal USA's

description, they do indeed align very fast, seemingly more so than the full-size sights, but at the cost of precision at longer ranges due to the significantly shorter sight radius.

The gun seemed a natural to have a tritium front sight, so I sent the Caracal C's slide to Amerigun in North Branch, Michigan. Amerigun specializes in custom sights and the installation of tritium and white outlines in existing sights. The end result was a front sight with a white outline surrounding a tritium dot that was indistinguishable from something that one would receive straight from the factory.

I cleaned and lubricated each gun before firing it, with the intention of not doing so again for the duration of the 1,000-plus rounds that I planned to run through each pistol.

Since I didn't plan to clean the pistols for the duration of the tests, I decided to start by firing them for groups while the barrels were relatively clean. For this task, I engaged the help of Wayne Dobbs, an instructor with Tiger Valley who is also a certified Vickers Method Instructor. Wayne is one of the best shots I know and has an equally impressive resume.

After firing a few mags for familiarization with both guns, we hit the bench at 25 yards with the Caracal F. Using a variety of Black Hills ammo, Wayne achieved five-shot groups in the four-to six-inch range, with one group of 124-grain FMJ hovering just over three inches. Most other ammo we tried provided similar results, but Wayne did manage a 2.5-inch five-shot group using Winchester Ranger 147-grain JHP. However, other groups fired with the same ammo proved less impressive.

When we switched to the Caracal C, Wayne's best group was 4.25 inches using Black Hills FMJ.

Although the Compact's Quick See sights are true to their name, anything less than perfect alignment magnified vertical dispersion at longer ranges. Not only did the gun have a short sight radius, but when looking through the rear sight, the width of the front sight did not allow for much light on either side. In shooting a group with some standard-velocity Black Hills 115-grain hollow points, I managed to put four

ing plate. Caracal USA is looking into having dovetailed rear sights on future models. An option on some of the Caracal F models will be a tritium dot in the front sight and one in the bottom of the rear sight.

The Caracal C comes with the same sight system, but for an additional \$75 it can be purchased with the company's unique Quick See sight system. This sight consists of two ridges milled into both sides of the slide. They extend from the front of the ejection port and end just before the front sight base. These wing-like ridges grow in height from the front of the slide and widen to form the sides of the rear sight, with the top of the slide serving as the sights' bottom. The back of these ridges form the rear sight itself.

Our sample C model came with these sights, while the F arrived with stan-

TRUE TO THEIR LOW BORE AXIS AND HIGH BACK GRIP, BOTH GUNS WERE VERY FLAT SHOOTING WITH MINIMAL MUZZLE FLIP.

shots into three inches at 25 yards. However, my less than perfect vertical alignment resulted in the fifth shot hitting eight inches above the rest of the group.

TRIGGER PULL

The official specs call for both guns to have a 4.4-pound trigger pull, and I used a set of trigger weights to measure the pull on each Caracal. The Caracal F's trigger broke at between 4.25 and 4.5 pounds, while the C's trigger pull came in at between 4.0 and 4.25 pounds. The triggers felt similar to a Glock but with a tad longer reset. Both triggers exhibited a clean break and smooth roll, making for a nice service trigger.

The trigger reset on the full-sized variant was sometimes uneven. Several shooters commented on this, but by the time I had about 600 rounds through the gun, I no longer noticed it.

True to their low bore axis and high back grip, both guns were very flat shooting with minimal muzzle flip.

T&E PARTY

I exposed the two Caracals to close to a dozen shooters, and the Compact proved the overwhelming favorite.

By the time the tests were finished, we had fired over 1,500 rounds through each of the Caracals with hardly any issues. At about the 800-round mark, the Caracal F failed to extract a case, and did so again about a hundred rounds later. Unsure if this was a fluke, I cleaned and lubricated it, and the gun functioned flawlessly for the remainder of the test.

The Caracal C experienced a single failure to feed with a hollow point at about the 1,200-round mark. The mouth of a Black Hills 115-grain +P JHP got caught on the bottom of the feed ramp. Since the friend who was shooting it was employing a stance that might have led to limp-wristing, I fired another 200 rounds of the same ammo through the gun using the magazine the gun had malfunctioned with, and experienced no further problems.

The only other issue I experienced with either gun was a pin in the grip of the compact that worked itself loose a few times. After a few unsuccessful attempts to fix it, some careful work with a small hammer and punch rectified it.

For holsters, the manufacturer has teamed up with Blackhawk to offer their Serpa holster. I found holsters for the S&W M&P45 or H&K USP work for the Caracal F as long as the holster does not include a snap or retention device.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Both guns exhibited the reliability and accuracy that would generally be considered within the acceptable range for a duty pistol for the amount of rounds fired. Considering the pistols were built by a company that had never produced a firearm, and hail from a country that had never done so either, this is a major achievement.

The American firearms market is a highly competitive one, with many high-capacity automatics vying for buyers' favor. How the Caracals will fare remains to be seen, but they have certainly put themselves on the map. ●

Top view of Caracal C's Quick See sights. ➤

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