

Concealed Carry Handguns - 2010 Guardian 380

MASSAD AYOUB: STATE BY STATE GUN LAWS—2010 EDITION

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Display Until Feb. 1, 2010

NAA GUARDIAN .380 ACP

*Tiny powerhouse
engineered to be
convenient, reliable,
and very effective!*

By Matt Berger

Anyone with a serious interest in firearms either knows of, or has at least heard of the little guns of North American Arms. They are the purveyors of a line of tiny, mini-revolvers in a number of styles and chamberings. While their originating claim to a chunk of the firearms market is the revolvers, they followed up this success with a compliment of ultra-compact semi-auto

pistols. NAA quickly gained a following from those who wanted the smallest hideout guns available for deep concealment, back-up, or easily carried everyday protection. These guns are all very durable, simple, and reliable, and won't break a budget.

I've been well aware of positive reception for the line of semi-auto pistols for some time. Over the years my good friend, Jerry Vancook, author of *Real World Self Defense*, and *Going Undercover*, had endorsed these little guns whenever the topic of concealed carry came up.

To be honest, on at least some level, I thumbed my nose at the NAA minis. I recognized the niche for such a weapon, its compactness and ease of carry and concealment made it ideal for back-up, or even carry when a larger gun was impossibility. But I pretty much carry big-bore pistols everyday, just about everywhere. I'll suffer the inconvenience of a little discomfort or adjust my wardrobe in order to carry serious firepower on the go.

But Jerry was persistent, and with his background of having faced the bad guys in deadly confrontations undercover, Jerry



NAA's Guardian .380 should serve as a trusted companion for any outing with a pocket holster by Mitch Rosen.

doesn't waste his time with stuff that doesn't work. Eventually I suspended the box of my thinking, and talked with Ken Friel at NAA about getting one of their Guardians in .380 to evaluate.

Gun Details

The Guardian arrived in a black polymer hard case with one spare magazine. It was attractive with its stainless frame, slide, and black Hogue grip panels in contrast. The flats of the slide are brushed, and roll marked "Guardian .380" on the right side, with the NAA

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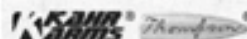
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NAA GUARDIAN .380 ACP

logo behind the ejection port. The left side is marked, "North American Arms, Provo UT," and the logo is cut into the slide just forward of the deeply cut cocking serrations. Both grip panels also bear the logo at the bottom rear. Its hammer is bobbed flush with the rear of the slide.

Starting from the top, the Guardian's slide is machined from 17-4 pH stainless steel solid bar stock. An external extractor is used, which is a 17-4 stainless stamping. The front of the slide is smoothly beveled and radiused to facilitate holstering and prevent snagging. A tiny rear sight block with a groove cut into the top is actually machined into the slide, as is the front blade. These miniscule sights are contoured to eliminate sharp corners, and the top of the slide has a flat rib and a matte finish.

The frame is also from 17-4 pH stainless steel, but it's an investment casting. It's done by Pine Tree Casting, a subsidiary of Ruger, who are known for producing castings with maximum strength and integrity. The casting fixture/tooling was produced specifically for the .380 Guardian to render its one-piece frame/barrel, an arrangement that has proved highly efficient in guns of this size. Due to the current tremendous demand in the market for these small carry pistols other firms are currently handling some of the frame machining, but eventu-



Note the slide stop, external extractor and bobbed hammer.



The Guardian's generous trigger guard works even with gloved hands.



Black Hogue grips contrasted nicely with the stainless pistol.



Rear sight was fixed square notch, and serrations are nicely done.

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SPECIFICATIONS

NORTH AMERICAN ARMS GUARDIAN .380

Caliber:	.380 ACP
Barrel:	2.49 inches
OA Length:	4.75 inches
Weight:	18.7 ounces (empty)
Grips:*	Polymer
Sights:*	Ramp front, square notch rear
Action:	DAO
Finish:*	Natural stainless
Capacity:	6-shot mag
Price:	Starts at \$449

(*) Many options available.

"The tiny pistol turned in stellar performance in accuracy for any handgun, let alone a pocket pistol."

ally all of it will be done in-house.

A slide release at the rear right of the frame acts as a takedown lever; once depressed, the slide can be moved to the rear and then tipped upward for removal from the pistol. The recoil spring rides under the barrel within a recess in the barrel and another in the frame capturing a double recoil spring and tiny plug. Interestingly, the left side of the grip frame itself is open with the left grip panel filling in the space. I assume this is done to minimize the thickness of the frame as much as possible.

Despite the diminutive size of the Guardian, the triggerguard is quite ample. The trigger itself is contoured such that it has a curved, smooth face. Though most guns this small have a heel-mounted magazine release, American shooters have a strong proclivity toward the traditional release mounted on the frame in front of the grip panels, hence, a serrated button is situated in that location. The barrel itself is 2.49 inches in length, has six lands and six grooves, and a rate of twist of 1-in-16 inches. At the business end is a tapered recess crown.

Small parts; hammer, trigger, drawbar, magazine and slide releases, are all 17-4 pH stainless of an MIM (Metal Injection Molding) process. The firing pin is also 17-4 stainless, machined from bar stock on a Swiss turning machine. The Guardian is available with an internal locking system for those who desire such a feature.

Grips are made by Hogue for NAA,

Continued on page 82

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and are glass filled nylon with a pebbled texture and a recess on the right panel for access to the slide release. Conveniently, there are a number of varying styles of grip panels made for these guns by Hogue (available from the NAA website) from exotic wood to dress the gun up, to Lasergrips from Crimson Trace.

All in all, the Guardian's machining, fit and finish were excellent throughout.

Range Test

Still cynical about the "mouse" gun, I gathered an assortment of ammo and headed for the range. My views were about to change. At 25 feet, I fired 5-shot groups at Champion Traps & Targets' "VisiShot" targets with 3-inch bulls-eyes. All groups were fired standing with a two-handed stance. The tiny pistol turned in stellar performance in accuracy for any handgun, let alone a pocket pistol. The tightest group of the day came with Hornady's 90-grain JHP XTP with all five rounds crowding into just 0.81 of an inch. CorBon's 90-grain JHP and Remington's 102-grain Golden Saber were close behind, both at 0.88 of an inch. Next in line was a 0.94 of an inch pattern of CorBon's 70-grain Pow'RBall. Black Hills' 95-grain FMJ and Winchester 85-grain Silvertip HPs each turned in groups of an inch even, and last, but not least, was CorBon's 80-grain DPX at 1.31 inches.

In a fight, you will not assume a perfect shooting stance and take your time to squeeze off perfect shots such as those fired in my tests. Yet knowing the gun shoots straighter than you can hold it is a nice place to start in terms of confidence. What's even more important on the street is that it goes "bang" every time you pull the trigger. Happily, the Guardian ran like a sewing machine, never failing to cycle or fire throughout my afternoon at the range. Such performance is all the more impressive when you consider that I couldn't manage to keep two fingers wrapped completely around the grip frame; my ring finger overlapped past the bottom of the Guardian's grip frame.



Guardian is about the same size as a cell phone. Note mags are available with a finger rest floorplate.



Five rounds of Hornady JHP XTP crowded into just 0.81".



Remington 102gr. Golden Saber BJHP produced a 0.88" pattern.

NAA offers magazines with a finger rest to remedy this, as well as extended 10-rounders; but I've always rejected the idea of taking a gun whose primary strength is its compact size, then growing its profile by adding such magazines.

The grip feels a bit unfamiliar, and I have a compulsion to hold it too high on the backstrap, inviting slide bite, but a bit of conscious effort and practice will overcome this after effect of carrying full-sized autos almost exclusively. Despite this, the Guardian feels good in the hand, and the textured Hogue grips make for a sure purchase. Felt recoil wasn't bad and I was able to maintain control, even during rapid fire drills. The only complaint I have is that the bottom of the trigger is pointed and sharp and my fat trigger finger overhangs, causing the trigger to dig in at the bottom. While not a problem during a drill or two, my all-day session produced an open cut. Bear in mind, as to all of my comments here, I have rather large hands.

Though I normally advocate an over-hand grasp on the slide of a self-loader for racking the action, in the case of the tiny Guardian, I found it more practical to use a "pinch-grip" with my index finger and thumb to operate the slide. I also found I had to shift the position of the pistol in my hand to depress the magazine release, though this was to get my thumb back far enough, rather than to reach for it as with a full-sized semi-auto. All of this familiarization was easily accomplished in a single range session.

Aside from the trigger's sharp bottom edge, its double-action-only operation is highly appropriate for this application. Normally I like a light trigger, but its 10-pound pull negates the need for a manual clothing-snagging safety and makes it safer for carry, which is the primary justification for the gun's existence. Nonetheless, the pull is smooth and even, and doesn't stack near the break, a positive in my book.

Whether North American Arms actively solicited other industry firms to do so or not, there seems to be a good number of

PERFORMANCE

NORTH AMERICAN ARMS GUARDIAN .380 ACP

Load	Accuracy
Black Hills 95 FMJ	1.00
CorBon 70 Pow'RBall	0.94
CorBon 80 DPX	1.31
CorBon 90 JHP	0.88
Hornady 90 JHP XTP	0.81
Remington 102 Golden Saber BJHP	0.88
Winchester 85 Silvertip HP	1.00

Bullet weight measured in grains, and accuracy in inches for 5-shot groups from 25 feet.



Author found IWB clip holster by Bell Charter Oak to carry securely and comfortably.



Mitch Rosen's pocket holster is from cowhide, and constructed rough side out for retention. It carries the Guardian efficiently, and breaks up the gun's contour.



Nylon rug is yet another mode by which the Guardian can be carried.

accessories available for the Guardians, which NAA has made all of these conveniently available through their website. I tested a pocket holster by Mitch Rosen, a rough side out cowhide, for positive retention of the holster in a pocket. Also tested was an IWB rig by Bell Charter Oak secured via a metal clip. Both were

well made and functional, and caused the pistol to disappear in a pocket or under a shirt. There are a number of others available, such as a gun rug holster and an ankle holster, both by DeSantis.

Final Thoughts

The little Guardian surprised me and won me over, mainly because of its high quality, tack-driving accuracy, and reliable function. I like the Guardian. There are a number of tiny pocket autos that frankly aren't worth your time or money, and the Guardian surely isn't one of them. Well engineered, nicely fit and finished, and solid where it counts, this is no cheap mouse-gun, despite its very affordable price tag. They are very aptly suited for carry as back-up guns or hideout guns and boast a simple point-and-shoot operation. NAA stands behind these guns with their lifetime warranty, and makes the claim that the result of their efforts is "an extremely high quality gun that's Convenient, Reliable, and very Effective." Having had one of them in my hands, put it through the ringer at the range, and carried it for many months, I feel confident in endorsing that claim as real. ●

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