

Para Anniversary Set

Shooters to the line: Load and make ready.

BY RICHARD VENOLA || PHOTOS BY MIKE ANSCHUETZ

Collectable commemoratives are nothing new, but Para USA has taken a different tack and is offering two anniversary models designed to be elegant, understated and affordable shooters.

Yes, a cased presentation piece is a testimony to precision and art, but taking one to the range can seriously reduce its value as an investment.

Where do gun guys show off their guns? At the range. And at the range, it would sure seem a bit cheesy to set out a glass-fronted box and say to your fellow enthusiasts, "Look, but don't touch." With Para's pair, your friends share in the celebration by putting rounds downrange.

The Single Stack

The Para USA Anniversary 1911 is straightforward and conventional. There are few of the performance features now normally encountered on custom and semi-custom guns. The satin PK2 finish and dark, richly smooth cocobolo grips are inviting, and the oil finish provides good purchase. The solid trigger and knurled hammer are old school, and the action is strictly G.I., as are the other internals.

The three-dot sights are wide, square and easy to pick up. They are Para's way of saying, "This is a gun for real-world use, an homage to a living design and not a nostalgic trip back to the Meuse-Argonne."

The techs certainly wanted a stout action spring, as the one in the gun seems to be nearly 18 pounds. The steel-slide-to-steel-frame fit is reassuringly tight and has that dull shucking feel when worked that tells you a lot of care went into its manufacture.

Aside from a very light sheen of oil, there was a light smear of grease on the locking grooves. The pistol was shot as it came out of the box.

The test gun arrived with two bumpered eight-round stainless mags. Both fell free, and there were no feeding issues.

The barrel is original with no feed ramp. Semi-wadcutters, screaming-hot reloads and non-SAAMI-spec factory ammo is not on the menu.

Shooting

The .45 range ammo bag held the following post-apocalyptic assortment of ACP:

Hornady 185-grain JHP FTX
Winchester 185-grain JHP Ranger STX

Black Hills 230-grain RNFMJ Red Box
Federal 185-grain JSWC Gold Medal Match
Black Hills 200-grain LSWC Blue Box
Aguila 230-grain RNFMJ
Winchester 230-grain RNFMJ White Box
Aguila 117-grain Defensive

Recent deluges had left a lake in front of the 25-yard line, so I set up eight-inch Shoot-N-C's on the 10-yard plywood. I fired off of a Shooter's Ridge Gorilla Bag and noted immediately that black sights in the shade blend in perfectly with the black of the target, so I was grateful for the half-inch-diameter orange bull's eye.

The RCBS trigger scale popped between 5¼ and just over 5½ pounds. There was zero creep and a crisp break, but I'm at a loss for a folksy metaphor to describe it.

Top honors went to the BH Red, with a 1¼-inch cluster, and the others were all two-ish. Both semiwadcutters balked, snagging on the chamber, and had to be fished out with a pocket knife. All the cartridges with rounded ogives functioned perfectly. Not a stovepipe in the bunch. I put the pistol through my make-it-jam protocol. In this, the pistol is fired upright to lock-back with both magazines, then fired



Oiled cocobolo is as understated as the satin-black PK2 finish. Para enthusiasts might be shocked at the absence of an LDA trigger, but they played it straight. The eight-round mags feature the Para USA logo on the bumper.

SPECIFICATIONS

Para USA 100th Anniversary Set 1911

TYPE: Recoil-operated
semiautomatic

CALIBER: .45 ACP

CAPACITY: 8+1

WEIGHT: 39 oz.

BARREL LENGTH: 5 in.

OVERALL LENGTH: 8.5 in

HEIGHT: 5.75 in.

WIDTH: 1.3 in.

SLIDE/FRAME: Steel slide and frame

FINISH: Black PK2

SIGHTS: Three-dot, front
blade, rear notch

TRIGGER: Single action

SAFETY: Thumb/grip

GRIPS: Smooth cocobolo

PRICE: Paired set \$2,299

MANUFACTURER: Para USA, para-usa.com



SPECIFICATIONS

Para USA 100th Anniversary Set P14-45

TYPE: Recoil-operated
semiautomatic

CALIBER: .45 ACP

CAPACITY: 8+1

WEIGHT: 40 oz.

BARREL LENGTH: 5 in.

OVERALL LENGTH: 8.5 in

HEIGHT: 5.75 in.

WIDTH: 1.5 in.

SLIDE/FRAME: Steel/stainless

FINISH: Slide: Black PK2,
Frame: Sterling

SIGHTS: Tritium three-dot,
front blade, rear notch

TRIGGER: Single action

SAFETY: Thumb/grip

GRIPS: Molded synthetic

PRICE: Paired Set \$2,299

MANUFACTURER: Para USA, para-usa.com



PARA ANNIVERSARY SET

left- and right-side up for several rounds, then fired upside down, then intentionally limp-wristed: no problems.

Opinion

This is an excellent 1911 by any standard. An affordable, upscale working gun, stylish yet reliable, with just the right features to make it practical and the nuances to make it a salute to Browning himself.

The High Cap

In 1988 Para's late designer Ted Szabo and his business-brain partner Thanos Polyzos broke all the rules and introduced a high-capacity .45.

Immediately, USPSA and IPSC competition rules had to be modified to level the playing field. The big hogleg continues on as one of the company's top sellers and has recently been upgraded on the advice of pistolero Todd Jarrett.

Anniversary P14-45

This celebration uses the proven PXT Hi-Cap Single-Action Limited as a vehicle for Anniversary laser engraving. This P14-45 features a stainless frame, steel slide and a host of competition features: ambi thumb safety, skeletonized hammer and trigger, upswept beavertail grip safety with speed bump and action-spring guiderod. Plus, it features the massive Kalashnikovesque Power Extractor, which is almost twice the width of stock—goodbye stovepipes, hello undeformed brass.

The fat, squared grip fills the hand, and

front- and backstrap checkering helps the molded synthetic grips. Both 14-round, bumper-bottomed magazines fed reliably and slipped out like a thief in the night. The well walls are quite thin and unbeveled. (Ten-round magazines are available for those 14-45 owners still living behind the Tofu Curtain.)

Dimensionally, the 14-45 is the same as a standard 1911 except the the grip: $\frac{3}{4}$ inch on the 1911, $1\frac{1}{16}$ inch on the 14-45. Oh, and it weighs 40 ounces compared with the original's 39.

A discrete chin rail allows for the mounting of an accessory. On careful examination, I noted that the tube containing the safety and slide lock is integral in the frame, leaving one less thing to come loose.

Shooting

Remember the lake in front of the 25-yard line? I discovered a path through the high weeds on the berm, so the 14-45 got group tested at 25 yards. I'd run out of Hornady and Winchester White Box by this time, but due to the feedramp and fully supported chamber, I was able to shoot both the semiwadcutters and some left-over 117-grain Aguila screamers.

Again I conducted my make-it-jam protocol. Getting the last couple rounds into the magazine was like putting a pregnant woman into a Miata, and an Uplula loader would have been greatly appreciated. Both magazines locked back the slide, and I had no problems with functioning. Right side,

left side, upside down, limp wrist—the pistol worked with every round.

Limp-wristing is, after deformed magazine lips, the most common cause of failure to function. This is simply a case of not holding the gun firmly enough. The frame has to be reasonably stable for recoil operation to perform its Newtonian dance of equal and opposite reaction. For the drill, the bottom of the grip is held very securely with the thumb and forefinger of my left hand, then the trigger and grip safety are pinched with the tips of my right thumb and forefinger. This allows the pistol to rock back, but prevents it from falling. The 14-45 was as stable as a howitzer.

I enjoyed the low-profile square-notch Trijicon three-dot sights, which are adjustable for windage and secured with an Allen wrench. For accuracy, the class valedictorian was the Winchester Ranger STX 185-grain JHP: three inches from the 1:16-inch left-hand-twist barrel. I think a better shooter with a trigger lighter than the test gun's five pounds could've tightened this up some, but that's what the morning yielded.

Opinion

If I were a lawman, this is the gun I'd want riding on my hip. I'd also take it for winning bets at the range. It's a manly gun for manly men who appreciate state-of-the-art equipment, but who can recognize the wisdom of using a proven design. MSRP for the pair: \$2,299. ☺



In keeping with the traditional themes, a stock bushing and spring tube were used on the 1911.



The P14-45's beefy 14-round magazine opens the frame up to $1\frac{1}{16}$ inches.