

PARA-ORDNANCE TORTURE TEST

After 5000 rounds their new LDA is a true winner!



The Para-Ordnance LDA 7-45 after 5000 rounds.

By Walt Rauch

I'm a believer now! When Para-Ordnance developed the LDA (Light Double Action) for the 1911, I dismissed it as just another gimmick for an excellent gun. An answer to a nonexistent question. After looking at the way it was built, I also didn't think the LDA design would hold up to any amount of extensive use. Add to this that my prior exposure to Para-Ordnance guns had been limited to an early wide-body frame that I had built



New guns and lots of ammo. What more could anyone want?



Factory cutaway LDA shows the inner workings of the action.



The LDA uses a drawbar to activate the firing mechanism.



Cooling the LDA down with water.

into a custom 1911—after going to five gunsmiths to get the gun to work right! These factors certainly contributed to my prejudiced view of the LDA and Para-Ordnance. Well, after 5,000 rounds in three days, I'm a convert.

About The LDA

Before getting into my epiphany, a description of the LDA is in order. The LDA is a short, light double-action that changes the 1911 into a hammer-down operation. Inside, the action is a cocking cam that pre-loads, or sets, the hammer in a single-action mode but with the hammer down and the trigger forward. As to this camming action, Para-Ordnance includes an instructional tape with each new gun. The tape is narrated and demonstrated by Todd Jarrett, an International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC) World Champion. The LDA action also adds another function to the grip safety:

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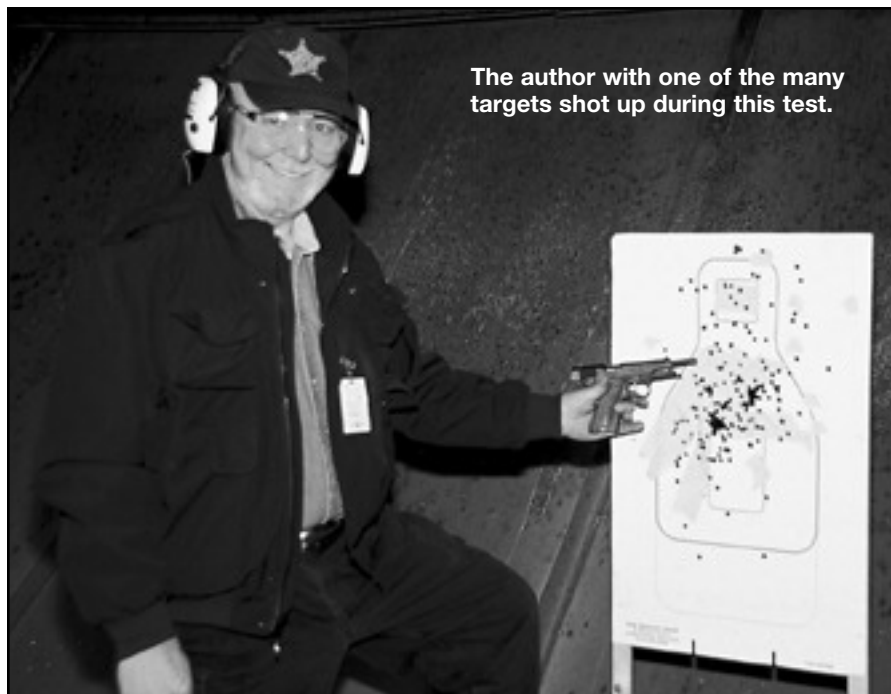
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besides blocking the trigger it must also be depressed to move the slide. Para-Ordnance 1911s have four safeties—the firing pin block (Series 80 design), thumb safety, the grip safety and the double-action trigger. After the slide goes forward chambering a round, the gun is ready to fire with the thumb safety off and the grip safety is depressed.

I had not tested one, although Jarrett had showed me a prototype and offered some hands-on shooting. At the time, I still dismissed the gun. While Jarrett was very persuasive and enthusiastic, I just couldn't see the point for the general 1911 user.

I continued in denial right up until my friend Kerby Smith took the position of communications and public relations director for Para-Ordnance. Kerby and I have been friends for over 15 years and I respect his opinion. He said the Para guns were good and that I had to get one for T&E. Now it became obvious that I had very little wiggle room left. I had none after Para-Ordnance owners Ted Szabo and Thanos Polynos extended an invite to Harris Group Publisher Shirley Steffen and me to visit the manufacturing facility. They also said that I could pick any LDA gun out of the delivery pile to shoot and test. It was put up or shut up time; I had to go!

The Para plant is located in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, and is state of the art with all the alphabet equipment in place. Then it was finally time for the main event. Two LDA 7-45s were pulled from the shipping desk as well as two prototype guns—the 6-45 LDA with 3.5-inch barrel and the 6-45 LLDA with a 3-inch barrel. All four guns were brought into the indoor test range. Alternating between the four LDAs, we managed to chew up the company's bin full of Winchester 230-grain JRN WinClean, Triton and Corbon +P JHP ammo. I must have shot 800 rounds through one particular gun alone. I shot it strong and weak hand, sideways and feathered the trigger to get the gun going as fast as possible. I experienced an occasional failure to chamber completely but could not identify the problem at the time. (More on this later.) After two hours with four guns, I was almost convinced the LDA was a viable concept and that the Para guns are reliable. As we were getting ready to close up for the day, Kerby gave me a quizzical look as if to say, "So, what do you think now?" (The nonverbal stuff is helpful, as we were double-plugged for hearing protection



The author with one of the many targets shot up during this test.



Repeated rapid fire only temporarily discolored the slide.



At about 1500 rounds, this side of the dustcover warped.



Despite the residue buildup, the Para LDA 7-45 kept running.

in the indoor range.) I asked him to give me this one gun for more shooting back home and get me 5,000 rounds of ball ammo. I had "heard" that the Para guns wouldn't hold up, and I figured I would be in a better position to evaluate the gun on home turf. I thought that 5,000 rounds of 230-grain JRN would be fair to determine if the gun would hold up mechanically. At the time, I wasn't interested to see if it would feed every exotic brand and bullet shape. I was hung up on the simple question of would it break and if so, when?

I also anticipated asking the Pistol Group at the Lower Providence Rod

and Gun Club in Oaks, Pennsylvania, to help get rounds downrange. Their skills range from beginner to advanced gun handlers, ages range from the 20s to the 60s, so I thought this would bring out any flaws in the gun if there were any to be found.

The one gun and the 5,000 rounds of Winchester WinClean 230-grain ammo arrived within three weeks. Now I had to fish or cut bait. I had kept a rough count of rounds fired while at the plant, and the gun would start this second phase with about 800 rounds already fired. Before that, I wanted another session with it, so I asked John Lysak and Joe Venezia to help me get another 1,500 rounds fired. They are very far advanced 1911 users, so I figured that if the gun was going to puke, it would be better here than in front of 20-plus shooters.

We agreed on a protocol. The gun was to be cleaned every 300 rounds. Each shooter was to fire only three 7-round magazines and then pass the gun along. I brought along Birchwood-Casey Gun Scrubber, brushes and Kel-Lube M12 lubricant. Joe Venezia did all the cleaning for consistency. Four magazines had come with the gun and

**Specifications:
Para-Ordnance LDA .45**

CALIBER: .45ACP
BARREL: 5 inches
OA LENGTH: 8.5 inches
HEIGHT: 5.75 inches
WEIGHT: 39 ounces
SIGHTS: Fixed; three white dots
RECEIVER: Steel
FINISH: Black
CAPACITY: 7+1

I provided another 22, including Wilson, Baer, Colt and GI mags with capacities of seven and eight rounds.

Torture Test

Everything started off well, but the gun quickly became too hot to handle. I cured this by pouring water over and into the gun until it cooled down and then we continued firing. At each 300-round break, the gun was also doused with water, fieldstripped and cleaned. We shot the gun slowly and also as fast as possible for the next hour and a half with 1,500 rounds done. Joe then fieldstripped the gun, inspecting it for wear and/or damage. He noticed that the right upper edge of the frame's dust cover was now a wavy edge rather than straight, but it wasn't interfering with the operation. Although Joe could easily have straightened this out, we elected to leave it alone just to find out what effect if any it would have on function.

The round count now was at 3,300 and the only problems were that the magazine catch would occasionally stick into the frame and not secure the mag and two rounds had hung up on the feed ramp. The mag catch worked after pushing it a few times and the feed ramp problem appeared to be caused by debris; when it was wiped, the problem went away. In point of fact, to get the gun running after the ramp stoppage, simply banging on the heel of the gun chambered the round. At home, I cleaned the gun more thoroughly and replaced the recoil and firing pin springs with a Wolff 18.5-pound recoil spring and the extra-heavy firing pin spring that comes in the Wolff spring package.

I was more confident now, so I enlisted the Pistol Group at LP, asking them to help me with the same protocol. I didn't want to monopolize their practice night, so I only brought 1,000 rounds of the Winchester ammo. The gun was cleaned as noted above at 300 and 600 rounds and then run without cleaning till the 1,000 rounds were consumed. The magazine catch did

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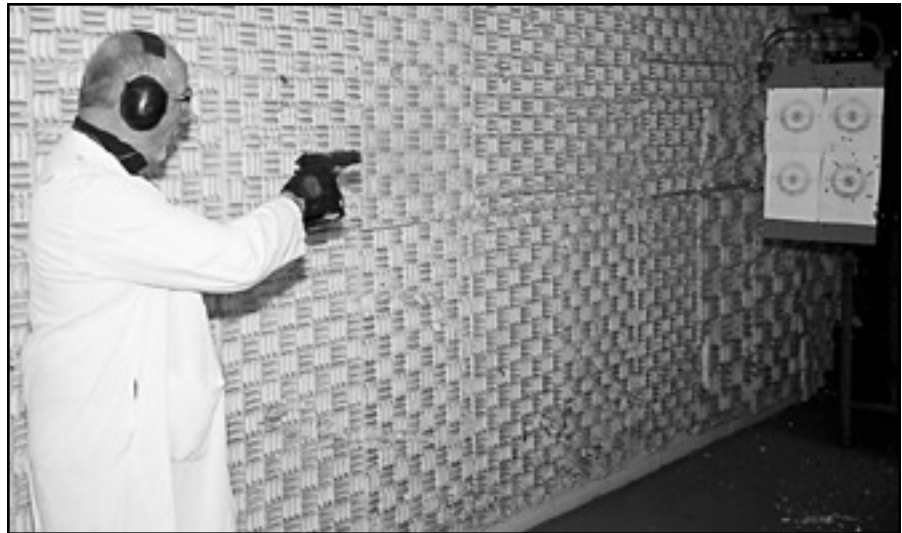
again occasionally stick in the frame and the same failure-to-chamber occurred with the same corrective action working. The gun ran with monotonous regularity. Yes, I did the water thing again, for with 30 mags and more than 20 shooters, the gun got hot and stayed hot! At the second cleaning, one member asked that I use some Tetra Gun lube, which he had found to be very good. Although this would change the protocol, I couldn't refuse a volunteer's request, so this lube went on in addition to the Kel-Lube M12.

During the last 400 rounds, the gun did slow down and some of the shooters observed that they could feel the slide hesitating as the gun went back into battery, confirming what I was also seeing as they shot.

All shot the gun proficiently. One already owns a wide-body Para LDA, but the rest had never fired one. Everyone said they liked the trigger action, even those who short-stroked the trigger the first few time they fired it. This only happened with 1911 shooters, who were accustomed to a shorter trigger reset. For everyone, the learning curve was very quick. I saw that when they fired the first seven rounds they shot slowly, learning the gun. With the second mag, they picked up the pace and they all hit their stride with the third mag. As reference, members of the group are armed with regular 1911s, SIGs, GLOCKs, Browning High-Powers and S&W revolvers.

Back home again, a detailed cleaning showed no excessive wear, but the copper bullet jacket material had become imbedded in the corners of the barrel grooves and resisted all the copper and Nitro solvent I had on hand despite a long time soaking and using a heavy-duty bronze brush. The only way I could remove the deposits was by gentle scraping. Now at this point, over 3,300 rounds of hardball had been fired by more than 25 shooters without parts breakage or malfunctions, and the brass continued to eject in a nice up-to-the-right-rear pattern. The shooting was getting monotonous. Nothing was happening. I figured I had confirmed the LDA is a solid piece of work and began to wonder how it would fare with a selection of premium JHP ammo. I also anticipated readers saying that 5,000 rounds of ball didn't prove enough, since most will use a JHP bullet in their .45s for personal protection.

Well, why not? This was my test anyway. I had 1,000 rounds of assorted



The author, testing the LDA 7-45 at the Para-Ordnance indoor test range.

The ammunition listed below was fired in the 5000-round test of the Para-Ordnance LDA .45ACP, with bullet weight in grains.

Black Hills—200 LSWC, 230 JHP, 185 JHP

CCI Blazer—230 JRN

Cor-Bon—200 JHP +P, Tactical Load 200 JHP, 230 JHP +P, 165 JHP +P, 185 JHP +P

Federal Hydra-Shok—230 JHP

Hornady—200 XTP JHP +P, 200 XTP JHP

Norma—200 JHP +P

PMC—230 JRN, Starfire 230 JHP

Pro-Load Tactical—200 JHP+P

Reloads-Rogers Bullets—200 LSWC

Remington GS—185 HP, 185 HP +P, 230 JRN, UMC 230 JRN

Speer GD—200 JHP, 230 JHP

Triton High Master—230 JHP, Hi-Vel 185 JHP +P

Winchester Supreme—230 SXT

Winchester Super Clean NT—170 JSP

Winchester Silvertip—185 HP

Winchester Target/Range—185 FMJ

Winchester WinClean—230 BEB

Wolf—230 JRN

high-performance ammo, so why not change or establish a new test parameter? I lubricated the Para again with Kel-Lube M12, put in another Wolff 18.5-pound recoil spring set and went back to the range.

John Lysak helped me empty the ammo range bag, loading seven rounds at a time into Wilson or Baer magazines, which will feed any type of JHP. Firing up 1,000 rounds of self-defense ammo in an hour and a half is an exhilarating experience. John and I both noted that this ammo's felt recoil ranged from normal (as defined by shooting GI hardball) to very stout as defined by shooting Triton and Cor-Bon +P loads. We also noticed that

some of the ammo has a definite muzzle flash or signature, while others must be using flash-retardant powder. We had two—repeat, two—malfunctions. The slide failed to close completely on two rounds. That is to say, the slide was out of battery about the thickness of a cartridge case rim and didn't respond to a simple tap, rack, attempt to fire. The two cartridges exhibited no irregularities and both chambered and fired when loaded again into the same magazines. The gun was extremely hot both times, hot enough that when water was poured over and into the gun, it immediately turned to steam. I cleaned the Para at the 300-, 500- and 700-round marks,



One thousand rounds of just high-performance .45 was shot without problems.

using Gun-Scrubber and M12 along with a nylon bore-cleaning brush.

During this last session, I decided to do some gun drills working from the holster. I immediately experienced two problems. I found that when I load a 1911 and holster it, I automatically put the thumb safety on, as would be a normal safe practice. I hadn't used the thumb safety in all the prior shooting and as I drew the gun I fumbled the fir-

ing sequence. I also experienced my usual difficulty in fully depressing the grip safety. The magazine catch would occasionally stick into the frame. This was caused by the internal mag catch stud vibrating forward such that the stud was binding on the frame.

Finally the round count and the test were done. I cleaned the gun once again and took it back to the range. This time I shot the Wolf 230-grain JRN

ammo that had given me problems in another 1911. This time I shot 100 rounds with no problem. Joe Venezia then fired another 50 rounds using his LSWC reloads from Rogers Bullets. Again, no problem. I then shot the gun for a five-shot group at 18 yards. They went into one inch using the Wolf ammunition! The trigger still broke at 5.75 pounds, the same as it did when I started.

Two last items. The Para-Ordnance guns are finished with fixed sights that have three white dots painted on them. The three dots were still on the sights after all this abuse. The black finish of the gun has not cracked or peeled and the gun still looks good. The wooden grips are still attractive, too. I have definitely changed my opinion of the Para-Ordnance LDA 7-45. As to the T&E gun, I'm not done with it quite yet. I think I'll try some more of the original 1911 tests on it—sand, mud, salt. We'll see... ●

**For more information
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