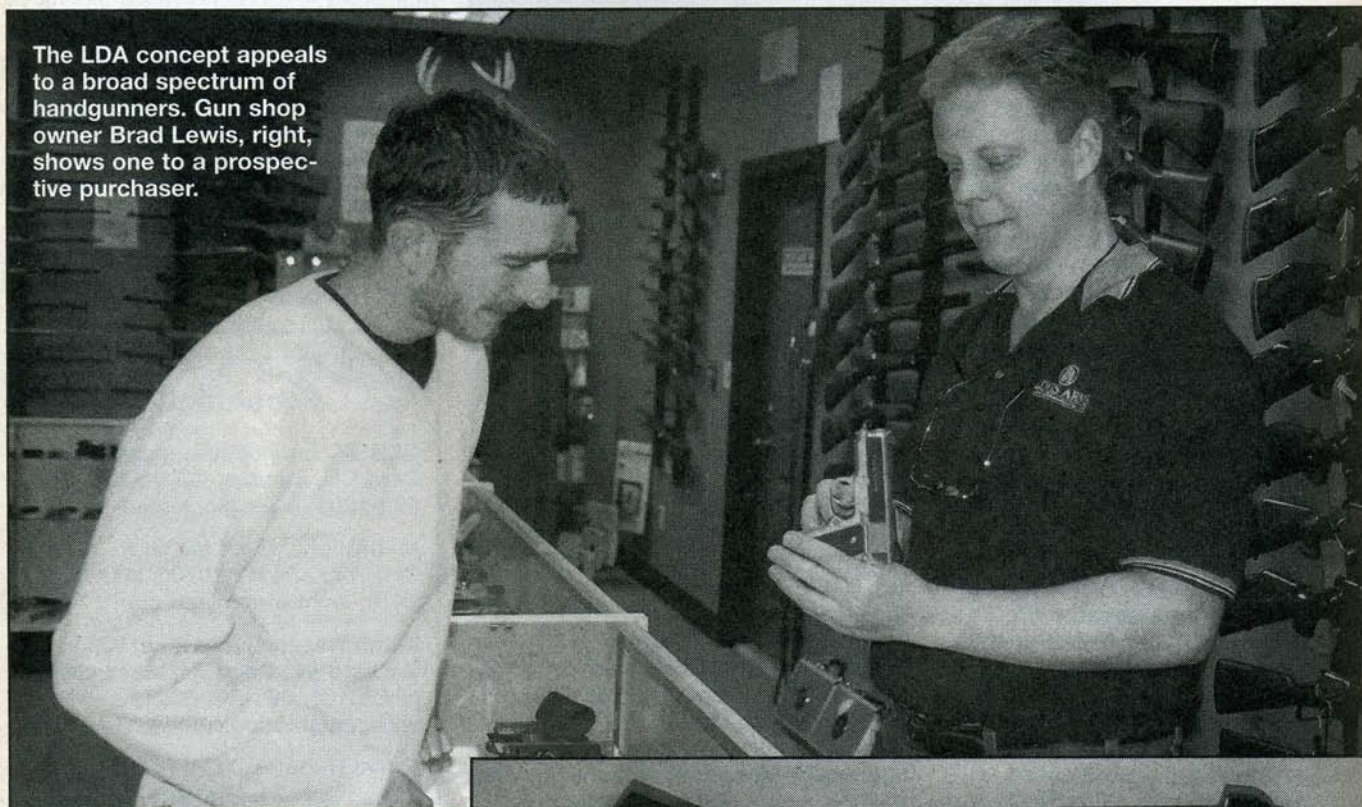


IN PRAISE OF THE PARA-ORDNANCE LDA

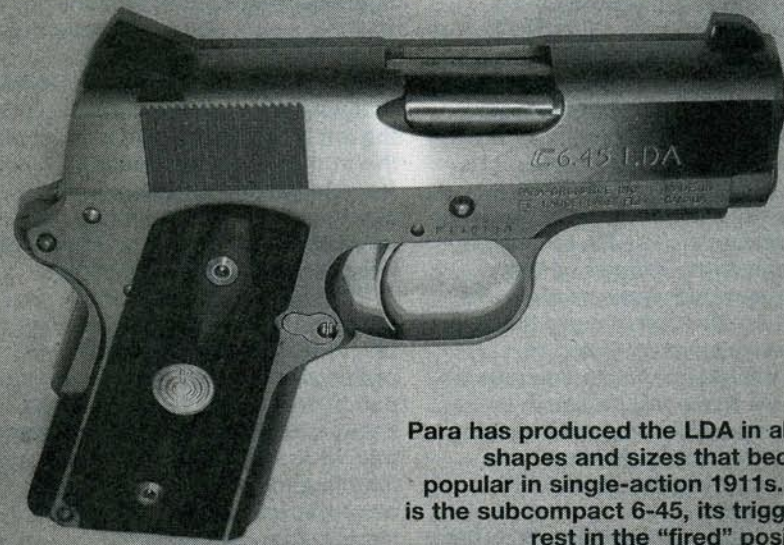
Now in its fifth year, this DAO .45ACP has carved a niche for itself and earned the appreciation of novice and expert alike.

The LDA concept appeals to a broad spectrum of handgunners. Gun shop owner Brad Lewis, right, shows one to a prospective purchaser.



In 1999, Para-Ordnance of Canada introduced the first truly successful double-action 1911 pistol, the LDA, and it's been a hit ever since. With every shot double-action-only, and a trigger pull nothing less than astonishingly light, the LDA instantly established itself as a gun that could give the shooter the much-appreciated feel of the time-proven 1911. At the same time, it eliminated the need for cocked and locked carry, which for generations had troubled police and military commanders, novices, and even a handful of genuine experts.

The LDA was not without its growing pains. Few radical new firearms concepts ever had been. I



Para has produced the LDA in all the shapes and sizes that became popular in single-action 1911s. This is the subcompact 6-45, its trigger at rest in the "fired" position.

was teaching a class in Illinois with one of the first ones when the gun broke on the firing line. It turned out that the straddle, a small connecting part in the ingenious design, had let go. I switched to a GLOCK 21 for the rest of the week, and the LDA went back to Para-Ordnance. Mine turned out not to be the only one with the problem. Para's in-house design genius Ted Szabo beefed up the connecting part, and his re-design of the little stirrup cured the problem.

Over the years, older generation magazines from Para-Ordnance have been known to take a set in the springs. This could cause malfunctions in single-action and double-action models alike. Of late, I'm told, Wolff extra-strength springs have become standard in all high-cap Paras, and pistolsmiths I know who specialize in these guns retrofit the Wolff springs into all older Para magazines. This seems to cure the problem. When in doubt, get the 7-45 LDA variation, which uses your favorite single-stack 1911 magazines.

Other than these two concerns, both already addressed by the factory, the LDA has matured into a trouble-free design.

"LDA" has always been presumed to stand for Light Double Action. The factory to my knowledge has never actually made that official. Certainly, it would be truth in packaging if they did. The trigger pull is factory specified at five to six pounds, and I know of one police armorer who measured a test LDA at four pounds trigger pull weight out of the box. This is what makes the gun so extremely controllable, and makes a friend out of most every serious shooter who fires one.

But when you start carrying and shooting one a lot, you start to realize that LDA might just stand for something else...

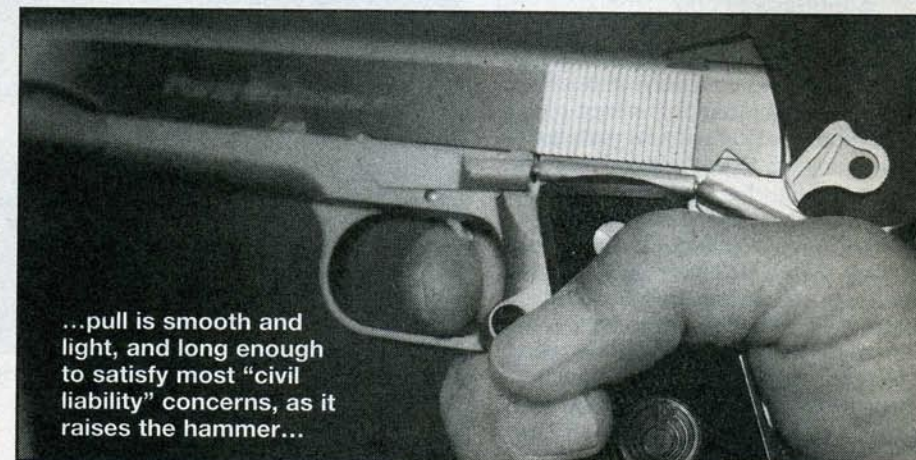
Luxurious, Delicious Accuracy

Going back through the files, I'm impressed with the accuracy I've gotten from Para-Ordnance LDA pistols. Most of mine have been full size guns with 5-inch barrels, which as with most 1911 designs tend to be more accurate than shorter models.

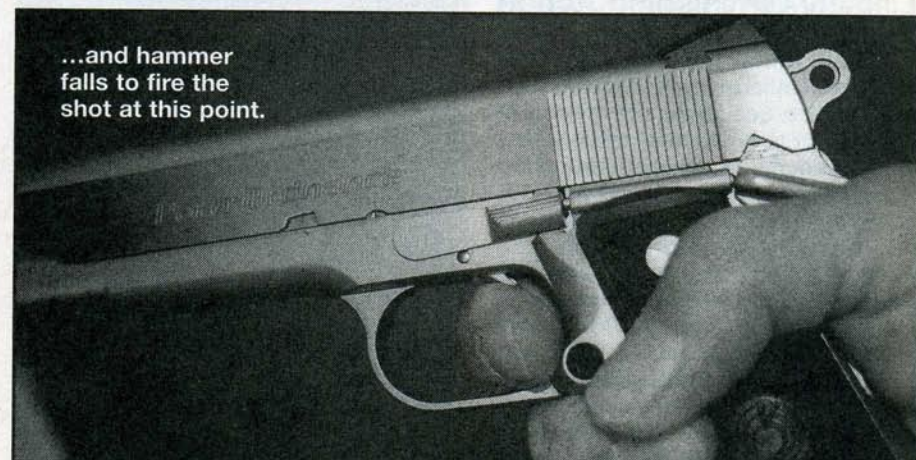
My first one, a high-capacity .45 tested in 1999, delivered five shots into 2 inches from 25 yards with Remington 185-grain standard velocity jacketed hollowpoints. My first single stack LDA, tested in 2000, delivered the following five-shot 25-yard groups. Pro-Load Tactical 200-grain JHP: 1.9 inches. CCI Gold Dot 200-grain JHP: 2.4 inches. Black Hills 185-grain JHP: 2.1 inches. Remington +P 185-grain JHP: 2.1 inches.



LDA trigger at rest is in its forward position...



...pull is smooth and light, and long enough to satisfy most "civil liability" concerns, as it raises the hammer...



...and hammer falls to fire the shot at this point.

Remington 230-grain Golden Saber JHP: 2.65 inches. Federal Match 230-grain hardball: 2.2 inches.

In 2002, I flew to Nebraska to test a 7-45 LDA tuned by Bill Laughridge, the famed pistolsmith. The facility where we did the accuracy testing allowed only 20 yards of shooting distance, not the usual 25. The test pistol had a Para-Ordnance barrel, not the match grade Bar-Sto of which Laughridge is so justifiably fond, but Bill had honed the factory barrel, recrowned it to eleven degrees, and installed a National Match barrel bushing. As a result, we found ourselves getting groups under 2 inches. CCI Gold Dot 185-grain JHP

put five shots in a group measuring 1.48 inches, and Federal's Personal Defense 165-grain JHP delivered a 1.51 inches five-shot group.

That, my friends, is accurate.

Lasting, Durable Arm

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Office tested the LDA with thousands and thousands of the hard-hammering rounds they issue for duty in their department-standard GLOCK 21 pistols, the 230-grain Winchester Ranger-T +P. The LDAs stood up. They were approved for private purchase to carry on duty, and two of the senior firearms men involved in

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the testing bought their own to carry at work.

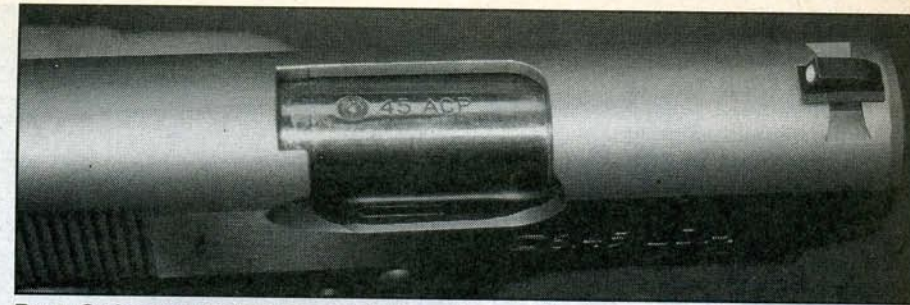
My friend and colleague Walt Rauch wrote, "I tested one LDA and, with the help of more than 20 shooters, fired 9600+ rounds of standard and +P loaded .45 ACP ammunition of various bullet shapes and weights. There were two failures to fire when the cartridge didn't go completely into the chamber, but these were simply caused by a dirty chamber, since all of the test firing was done in hours not days. Other than this minor hesitation, the gun worked just fine."¹

One caveat, though: if you're going to shoot a lot of +P in these guns, put in heavy duty recoil springs and perhaps even a Wilson Shok-Buff system. Para-Ordnance CEO, Ted Szabo, once told me that the recoil force of +P .45 ACP ammo is so violent to the gun's parts that a pistol which can last 100,000 rounds with standard GI ammo will probably only last 50,000 rounds of the hot +P stuff.

Liability Diminishing Action

The US military got away from the 1911 pistol in large part because its single-action design was perceived as a risk factor in accidental discharges. The great majority of American police departments prohibit cocked and locked single-action guns on duty because of the same perception. Much has been made of the fact that single-action 1911s have been adopted by FBI's Hostage Rescue Team (Para-Ordnance) and SWAT teams (Springfield Armory), and by LAPD SWAT (Kimber). However, we can't escape the fact that FBI and LAPD issue these single-action autos only to their most elite, most highly trained units, and require either traditional double-action-only autos or GLOCKS for their rank and file armed personnel.

If only because sometimes "the perception is the reality," a huge segment of the handgun using public, armed citizens as well as law enforcement, are more comfortable carrying double-action pistols for civil liability reasons. Since a traditional double-action auto cocks itself after the first shot, it is perceived by some as a possible "accident waiting to happen"



Para-Ordnance makes accurate barrels, and their guns are famous for tight groups in proportion to barrel length.



In slow fire, you can "stage" an LDA trigger to this point, and then squeeze off a "trigger-cocked" shot.



If grip the hi-cap Para is too fat, the single stack models allow you to get "more hand around gun."

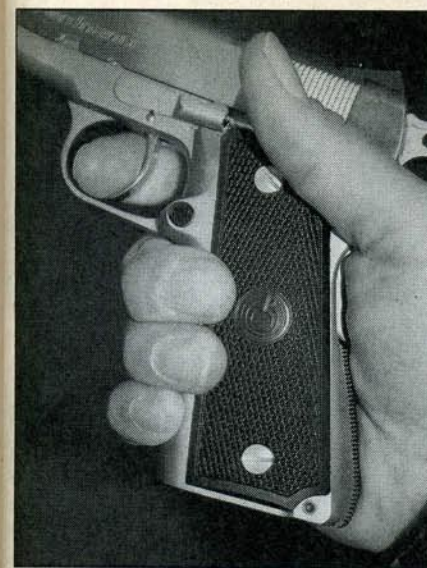
until it is decocked. This has made the double-action-only auto a very strong presence in American law enforcement today. This is why our two largest police departments, NYPD and Chicago PD, authorize only DAO pistols. This is why our largest uniformed Federal law enforcement agency, the US Border Patrol, went DAO when they adopted the Beretta 96D .40 caliber pistol. And it is why the GLOCK took off and became the most popular American law enforce-

ment sidearm hands-down only after the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms officially determined its patented Safe Action design to constitute a double-action-only mechanism.

Enter the Para LDA, clearly double-action-only in both the mechanical and operational sense. With its light, easy pull, it is one of the most shootable such guns, and many have called it the most shootable DAO autoloader. This has been a cornerstone of its popularity.

I tested Bill Laughridge's Cylinder & Slide Shop CST-1 custom LDA with Bill and Frank Belsky. Frank is an attorney who has done his share of firearms liability cases, and is a Vietnam combat vet and several time graduate of the prestigious Chapman Academy of Practical Shooting. His perspective on this issue is very much worth listening to.

Said Attorney Belsky, whose 21 years of trial practice include nine years as a prosecutor, "I think that for the average individual, the LDA would be a superior weapon because its design helps prevent accidental discharge. It has an excellent trigger, particularly after Bill is done with it. Even with only five pounds of pressure, it's long enough that it's most unlikely to unintentionally discharge." Part of Laughridge's custom work is an action job that brings the six to seven pound pull of an LDA down to



Stainless LDA 14-45 can hold 14 rounds of .45 ACP with its "wide-body" grip frame.

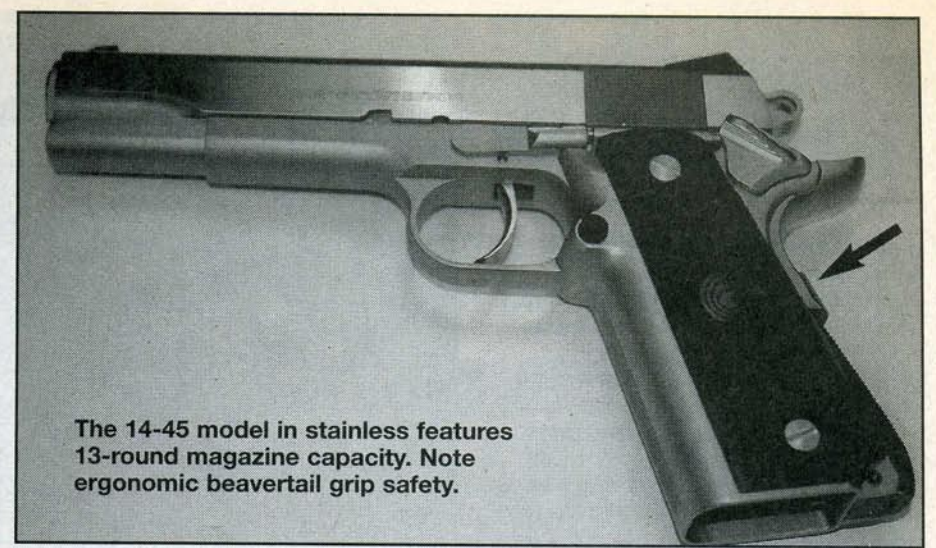
five pounds.

Continued Belsky, "I think for any person not deeply familiar with the cocked and locked pistol, and not constantly training with it, the LDA makes a lot of sense, especially after Bill Laughridge has gone over it."

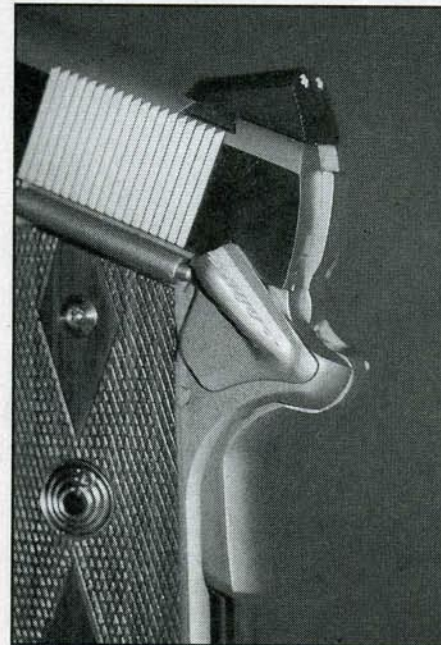
Police departments who've examined the LDA see its rationale. The North Attleboro (Massachusetts) Police Department has adopted the Para-Ordnance LDA as their standard issue duty weapon. The state of Kansas has two uniformed state police agencies—one in essence is a highway patrol and the other is a more traditional SP organization. Each is separately budgeted. Both issue .45 autos. One issues the GLOCK 21 and a 12-gauge pump shotgun to each trooper. The other, apparently with a proportionally more substantial budget, has adopted the Para-Ordnance LDA pistol and a .223 semiautomatic rifle for all armed personnel.

We have seen an increase in the last couple of years in the number of police officers murdered with their own handguns or those of their partners. In none of the cases that I'm aware of at this writing were the police handguns involved carried "on-safe." Over the years we have seen countless cases of police officers' lives saved when someone got their pistol, tried to shoot them and perhaps other officers with it, and were unable to do so because the criminal who snatched the gun didn't know how to operate its safety. This has been seen in some armed citizen encounters as well.

The 1911 pistol's frame-mounted safety is generally considered the easiest and most ergonomic to operate swiftly and reflexively when in



The 14-45 model in stainless features 13-round magazine capacity. Note ergonomic beavertail grip safety.



A flat, spurless hammer is standard on smaller LDAs like this subcompact 6-45 LDA, and allows the safety strap on a holster designed for cocked and locked pistol to fasten over the down-position hammer.

the hands of a trained and competent user. It is just as likely to foil a criminal gun-grabber as an on-safe Beretta, Ruger, or S&W, whose safety is mounted on the slide in a position some legitimate users find more difficult to get at. While the LDA licenses the Colt Series '80 passive firing pin safety system, and is therefore "drop-safe" and technically safe to carry with the manual safety disengaged, every single person I know who carries an LDA carries it with the thumb safety "on." This gives a significant margin of survival in a gun grab attempt. Para-Ordnance offers the LDA with an ambidextrous safety catch as an option.

A unique element of the LDA design is that the grip safety must be

depressed before the slide can be activated. I think this is a good thing. It forces the shooter to have a proper, safe, firm grasp of the grip-frame while operating the mechanism. And, in line with what we were just talking about, it may tend to confuse and slow down a dangerous person who has obtained unauthorized access to such a pistol.

Liked by Defense Aces

The overwhelming majority of card-carrying gun experts have made positive comments on the LDA. Let's read a few.

Walt Rauch has this to say: "The Para-Ordnance LDA pistol is a bad news-good news situation. The bad news is that by simply dry firing the gun you won't appreciate the LDA design. The good news is that if you have the opportunity to put some rounds down range, you'll probably want to buy the gun...Initially, I was a skeptic of the LDA but now I do, on occasion, carry one for self-defense."²

Gary Paul Johnston tested the Para-Ordnance Carry LDA for the December 2003 *Combat Handguns*. Black Hills' hot 185-grain JHP ran at 1114 feet per second (fps) out of this gun's stubby 3.63-inch barrel, and delivered five-shot, 25-yard groups with that ammo ranging from 2.49 to 2.78 inches and averaging 2.62 inches, the best of his test. The retired police supervisor and SWAT cop observed, "Although I am well acquainted with the LDA system, I still like my Novak Para-Ordnance P-14. However, I must admit that the LDA is the more user-friendly of the two systems, and is also just as accurate. It also grows on you in a hurry."³

Gila Hayes is one of the best

(2) Ibid.

(3) "New Para-Ordnance Carry 12.45 ACP," by Gary Paul Johnston, *Combat Handguns* magazine, December 2003, pages 14-15

(1) "Para-Ordnance LDA" by Walt Rauch, in 2003 *Standard Catalog of Firearms* by Ned Schwing, page 791.

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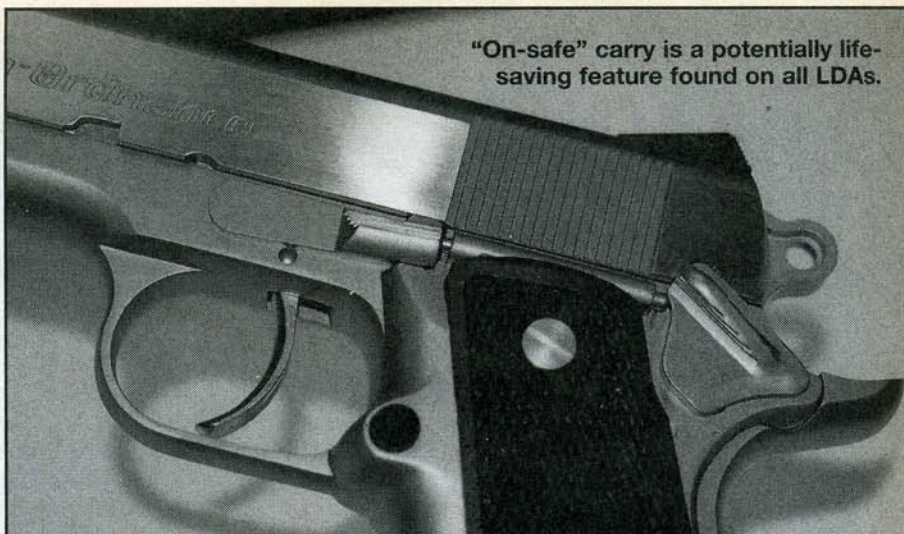
defensive firearms instructors of either gender in the world, and a superb combat pistol shot. She and her husband, Marty, run the famous Firearms Academy of Seattle in Onalaska, Washington. I was there when she beat about 25 people in a hard-fought contest on a very fast course...in fact, I was one of those she trounced. My gun that day was a \$2400 big-name custom 1911 single-action with three pound trigger pull that shot an inch at 25 yards, and some of the others were similarly equipped. Gila's gun when she took first place? An out of the box Para-Ordnance LDA.

Another top firearms instructor in the Northwest is Jim Jacobs. He switched to the 7-45 LDA a couple of years ago because he recognized his duty as a role model to the large number of concealed carry students he teaches each year. He feels a cocked and locked gun just isn't for beginners. He shoots his LDA as well as he always did his single-action 1911, which is to say, very well indeed.

Last but far from least, consider Todd Jarrett, the World Champion IPSC shooter. Todd shot his way to fame with single-action Para-Ordnance pistols, but these days he spends more time with the LDA. This is what he shoots in the Stock Service Pistol class of IDPA, and in the (double-action) Production class of IPSC. And he's kicking butt, proving the soundness of this user-friendly design. I was match director at the IDPA Mid-Winter National Championships a couple of years ago when Todd racked up the best score of the match, beating all the ultra-light triggered custom cocked and locked pistols of the Enhanced Service Pistol and Custom Defensive Pistol categories. His gun? The fancy grade Para LDA, identical to the one you can order through your dealer.

Yeah, Jarrett's a professional shooter who works for Para-Ordnance. That's not the point. The point is, he's winning with that LDA he gets paid to shoot, and winning against the very best, including other great champions who are paid to shoot something else.

If you're a 1911 fan, the single stack LDA will accept any magazine that works in your GI .45 automatic. I'm partial to the Wilson-Rogers in my own Para 7-45. Your high-cap LDA



"On-safe" carry is a potentially life-saving feature found on all LDAs.



Internal firing pin safety (licensed copy of Colt Series '80) makes the LDA safe to carry with manual safety disengaged as shown.

will take the magazines from your old high-cap Para single-action of the same size and caliber. Best of all, the LDA will fit your regular 1911 holsters.

Well, most of them. If your 1911 holster has a safety strap, it was probably cut to fit properly when the gun was cocked and locked. The LDA rides with the hammer down, and its big hammer spur may keep the strap from fastening. If you require or prefer a safety strap holster (and if you do, I'm on your side) you can order your gun with what Para-Ordnance calls the LE (law enforcement) hammer. This has a flat and spurless configuration, much like what you see as factory equipment on the smaller LDA models intended for easy concealed carry.

Little, Delightful Attributes

One thing that bothered me over the decades on three police departments where I carried a cocked and

locked Colt .45 automatic in an exposed duty holster was that in rain or snow, the firing pin area of the pistol was exposed to the elements. With the hammer always down, the LDA avoids that.

In the same setting with the exposed uniform gun, there was always the "Oh, my God, your gun is cocked" thing. I eventually got a Don Hume hammer shield designed for service revolver holsters and put it over the strap on my 1911 duty rig. This helped protect from the elements, and shielded the cocked hammer from the eyes of people who got nervous about things they didn't understand. But, the point is, you don't have any of that with the LDA.

The bottom line is simple: whatever LDA stands for, this double-action-only 1911 has proven itself. Gun purchasers are voting for it with their wallets, and for very good reason. As I said in print about five years ago when it first came out, the Para-Ordnance LDA is an idea whose time has come. ■

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