

THE PARA USA GI EXPERT¹¹

Reviewed by Peter Caroline

Ever since I bought my first 1911, a WWII-surplus beater, back in the 1950s, I have owned or tested literally dozens of versions of this classic design. Some were great, some were good and a few were truly dreadful. You'd think, at this point, I'd be totally burned out on Old Slabslides, but every once in a while there's one that makes me think, "Well, maybe just this one more."

At the SHOT Show in Orlando this year, I got a close look at Para's new GI Expert. My first impression was, this is the best-looking gun that Para has ever produced. It's not a fancy race gun – in many ways, it's very plain... single-action, single-stack, matte black. But it has that rock-solid, purposeful look that is the hallmark of every well-designed working tool. It looks exactly like what John Moses Brown originally designed it to be, a formidable and totally reliable defensive weapon. But wait – as they say on TV – there's more.

Look a little closer at the GI Expert, and you'll see some features that Mr. Browning did not incorporate in his design. Start with a very clear three-dot fixed sight system, and both front and rear sights are dovetailed in place. The ejection port is lowered and flared. The barrel is a premium stainless steel number with a polished feed ramp. The hammer spur is a modern, skeletonized configuration, designed not to bite, even though the grip safety is traditional, and not of the beavertail variety. This lightened hammer offers a quicker lock time. You have to look really close to see that the magazine well is subtly beveled; it works smoothly without looking like the entrance to a cave.

One thing that really surprised me about the GI Expert was how well the frame and slide fit together, very much like the work of a top custom pistolsmith. Working the slide back and forth feels slick and smooth. And the trigger is anything but G.I. – about five pounds, and clean and crisp. The finish is Para Kote™ Covert Black. This is a far cry from the old parkerized finish of WWII days. It's a proprietary baked-on matte finish that includes Teflon, so reciprocating surfaces work much more smoothly. In addition, it's a

cinch to clean. Most powder residue can usually be wiped right off with a clean cloth.

Now Para's 2009 catalog describes the GI Expert as "The 1911 that makes you an expert shot." This will make **ME** an expert shot? That's a pretty damn tall order. All advertising hyperbole aside, the GI Expert will not prevent you from achieving Expert ranking, assuming that you have the requisite eyesight, coordination, discipline and practice.

To test my purported new "expert" status, I took the GI Expert out to the range. As we are all now well aware, obtaining factory ammo can be a bit of a problem nowadays. I did have a sufficient supply of both Winchester white box and CCI Blazer Brass 230-grain ball to put the new pistol through its paces. The first thing I noticed about the GI Expert is that, like every Para pistol I've ever fired, it

works flawlessly right out of the box, with apparently no break-in required. This is always a desirable trait, and particularly right now. I try to use the most easily obtainable factory ammo for testing, and save my reloads for fun shooting.

After finishing off both full boxes of ammo, I can agree that the GI Expert will indeed allow you to perform to the limit of your capabilities. From the bench, small groups are easily obtainable. Ditto off-hand. This pistol is a pleasure to shoot. The sights are highly visible

even for Mr. Magoo types. The trigger is just right. It's not a light target trigger, but it's quite appropriate for a multi-purpose, primarily defensive handgun. I tried mixing in some odd hollow-points and light semi-wadcutters to see how they fed, and they presented no problems whatsoever.

The Para GI Expert comes in a tough, lockable hard case, with two eight-round magazines, the obligatory cable lock, a barrel bushing wrench and a small tube of Mil-Comm TW-25B lubricant. I saved the best part for the last: the MSRP (and *nobody* pays MSRP) is only **\$599!** I've paid twice as much for 1911s that didn't shoot half as well.

Para USA

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