

10 Picking the Pocket 9s: Comparison Review of t

Story and Photo by Peter Caroline

The venerable 9mm Parabellum cartridge has been around since 1902, longer than any other popular semiauto centerfire round. It's been a favorite of military forces worldwide, and in recent years has been chambered in a number of pocket-sized pistols, from the ubiquitous Kel-Tec to the rarely seen Rohrbaugh. Even Colt briefly came out with a couple of marginally pocket-sized 9s. But then some marketing genius came up with the idea of a 1911-style pistol scaled down to 9mm dimensions, and the race was on. Now, the title of "World's Smallest 1911" is up for grabs, and the two main contenders are Springfield Armory and Para. Springfield's entry is called the EMP (Enhanced Micro Pistol), and Para's is the PDA (Personal Defense Assistant).

Let's weigh both contenders. The Para PDA weighs 24.9 ounces with an empty magazine; the Springfield EMP weighs 26.4 ounces. Dimensions are fairly close: the Para is 4.75 inches in height with the magazine removed, and the Springfield is 5 inches; the PDA is 6.4 inches long, the EMP is 6.6 inches long, thanks to the beavertail. The Para magazine holds eight rounds, and the Springfield magazine holds nine.

The Para and Springfield 9mms look very similar. Both sport a handsome two-tone finish, fancy wood grips, three-dot tritium night sights with a windage-adjustable rear sight, ambidextrous safeties and three-inch fully supported ramped barrels. Both have dual captive recoil springs. The EMP magazine well is slightly beveled; the PDA's is not. The EMP comes with three magazines; the PDA with two. They differ most in trigger action. The Springfield has a conventional single-action trigger; the Para features their distinctive LDA (Light Double Action). The Para PDA has no hammer spur, as there is no need for manual cocking.

After several individual shooting sessions, I took both pistols out to the range at the same time. Initially, I had some problems with the Springfield EMP. The trigger, which the factory specs indicate at five-to-six pounds was actually off the scale on my Lyman eight-pound-limit trigger pull gauge. Several hundred rounds and a whole lot of dry-firing later, the pull did get down to six pounds, which is a bit high for a single-action auto, in my opinion, particularly one with an MSRP over \$1,300. The Para trigger, which is their LDA (Light Double Action), is also

six pounds, but six pounds in a smooth, stageable double-action feels like a whole different animal. I've fired Para LDAs in every configuration from this tiny 9mm to the big double-stack 14•45, and the double-action trigger is identical in every one of them.

Although I must admit a partiality to the Para LDA trigger, in offhand shooting I actually got slightly smaller groups with the Springfield. Go figure. The PDA's sights are a bit higher than the EMP's, and both have equally comfortable grips. The magazine base has a more pronounced lip on the PDA than on the EMP, but I couldn't detect any real difference in support, since I have a fairly small hand, and my little finger didn't quite cover the magazine base.

I set up my portable bench at 20 yards, the limit on this particular piece of desert real estate. The Shooters Ridge bench is quite an asset. It weighs only 35 pounds, has a comfortably padded seat, and folds up quite flat. It comes with a Y-shaped rest for rifles or pistols. Using the rest, I was able to get 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 inch five-round groups from each pistol. Overall, there was no marked difference in accuracy. Neither is intended for competition, and both will fill the bill quite adequately for a defensive weapon.

What it comes down to, finally, is a difference in price and trigger action, and a one-round difference in capacity. The Springfield Armory EMP costs about \$200 more than the Para PDA. The Springfield is single-action; the Para is double-action, which is off-putting to some shooters and attractive to others. The Springfield puts one more round at your disposal. Both are top-quality pistols. If you haven't already spent your economic stimulus check on such frills as gasoline or groceries, either of these pistols would be an excellent investment.

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