

ING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT¹¹

Story and photo by Peter Caroline

There are handguns designed specifically for combat, like the classic Government Model 1911A1. There are handguns designed specifically for international target competition, like the Hämerli 160. There are handguns designed specifically for hunting, like the Smith & Wesson 460 XVR. And then there's *"The Earl."*

"The Earl" from North American Arms is rather difficult to classify. Like many of N.A.A.'s products, it's a .22 caliber, five-shot single-action, spur-trigger revolver. Like the rest of N.A.A.'s line, it is superbly crafted; you have to look twice to see where the sideplate is fitted, for example. But unlike the rest, it is certainly not a deep-conceal-

ment handgun. On that tiny stainless steel frame, the 4" heavy octagonal barrel appears almost as long as a Buntline Special. And the pivoted "loading lever" (it actually secures the cylinder pin) beneath the barrel harks back to the Remington Army revolver of Civil War days. With its fancy, square-butt laminated wooden grips, *"The Earl"* looks like something that might have been carried by a (very small) gunslinger of the Reconstruction era. Why is it called *"The Earl?"* What first occurred to me was the '50s oldie, "Duke of Earl," but I guess I'm showing my age. In fact, the revolver was named after the NAA gunsmith who came up with this unusual design.

"The Earl" comes equipped with sights that are quite simple but effective. The rear sight is a square channel in the top strap; front sight is a round post that narrows at the top. And as in many single-actions, the sights are not visible until the hammer is cocked.

Ergonomics of this revolver are...uh, different. I have a fairly small hand, and I found that I could fit only my first two fingers around the grip. This might be a problem if *"The Earl"* had any appreciable recoil. Fortunately, it is chambered for .22 Magnum, with an optional .22 Long Rifle conversion cylinder.

Loading and unloading are accomplished in the time-honored tradition of pulling the hammer back to half-cock, removing the cylinder pin and

then inserting the rounds in the chamber or punching out the empties with the cylinder pin. *"The Earl"* incorporates the North American Arms Safety Cylinder feature. This allows the revolver to be carried fully loaded. There are halfway notches between the chambers, and the hammer can be lowered into one of these notches after the gun is loaded. It's a far simpler and more ingenious solution than trying to fit a transfer-bar safety into this tiny frame.

Okay, it's pretty (or at least, pretty unusual), but does it shoot? The answer is yes, and it's a ton of fun. Initially, I found myself grouping to the left with the .22 Mags, even more so with .22LR. I found this to be a function of the grip, or more

specifically with MY grip.

The combination of a fairly small grip and the spur trigger requires a fairly tight two-hand grip plus more concentration on trigger control. Once I got that sorted out, hits became more predictable. *"The Earl"* will never be a target pistol, and it makes no claim to be, but in the area of backyard pest control, it really shines. I nailed a pack rat in back of our patio with a .22 Mini-Mag shot load at about five-to-seven yards. Having had to replace several motor scooter wiring systems and one whole car, thanks to those little vermin, I am no great fan of pack rats.

"The Earl" comes in a black padded hardcase with the obligatory little padlock (for the case, not the gun). There's also an instruction manual, a catalog and order form for some neat accessories and a \$10-off certificate for NRA membership in case, God forbid, you're not already an NRA member. MSRP is \$289, or \$324 with the .22 LR conversion cylinder. To carry *"The Earl"* in style, NAA offers a fitted belt-grade leather holster in black or brown with the North American Arms eagle logo on the flap for \$40.

One of my annoyingly practical friends asked, "Well, it's real cute, but what's it for?" You might well ask what puppies, yo-yos or Fourth of July sparklers are for. It's for fun, dammit!

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