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Budget-Priced

1911 .45

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20TH CENTURY CLASSIC

German P.08 Luger Pistol



Kahr's Auto-Ordnance Government Model .45

A worthwhile
budget-priced
1911 autopistol.

SPECIFICATIONS: **Auto-Ordnance** **Model 1911PKZ**

Manufacturer:

Kahr Arms/Auto-Ordnance
Dept. GAH
630 Route 303
Blauvelt, NY 10913
845/353-7770
www.tommygun.com

Action Type:

Locked breech, semi-automatic,
single action pistol

Caliber:

.45 ACP

Capacity:

7+1

Overall Length:

8.5 inches

Barrel Length:

5.0 inches

Weight, empty:

39 ounces

Sights:

Blade front, rear drift—
adjustable for windage

Finish:


Matte black Parkerizing

Grips:

Brown synthetic

Price:

\$515



The 1911A1 pistol was the military sidearm of the American forces for almost sixty years and it is safe to say it remains *the* American handgun, even if another design and caliber is now the designated service pistol for America's armed forces. Some in the shooting community complain and seem to tire of the continual reporting or what they feel is the redundant exposure of different 1911 style pistols, but the truth is the wide variety of manufacturers making so many 1911 type pistols remains the best indication of the inexhaustible market interest in what is undoubtedly a timeless design for a self-defense handgun.

Many manufacturers offer high quality, absolute top-of-the-line 1911 style products, but a more difficult question to answer for those with limited funds to spend on a good self-defense pistol is who has the lowest cost, yet most serviceable 1911 pistol on the market today?

LOOKING AT AUTO-ORDNANCE

Auto-Ordnance is an old name in the American firearms industry. Originally established by John Thompson and financier Thomas Fortune Ryan in August 1916, this firm was responsible for the development and marketing of the famous Thompson submachine gun. Over the decades since its creation the firm has passed through a number of owners. During World War II, the firm was owned by

By Frank W. James





Fig. 1

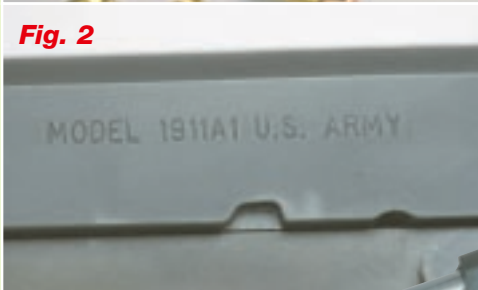


Fig. 2

1911 PKZ



Fig. 3

Russell Maguire and the company together with its subcontractors produced more than one and three-quarter million Thompson submachine guns in various models and enough spare parts to assemble another quarter of a million guns.

Following the war, Maguire sold the Auto-Ordnance Corp. to Kilgore Mfg. of Westerville, Ohio, who later

sold the firm to an investment group headed by Frederic Willis. Willis not having any success with the company whose sole product was an admittedly obsolete submachine gun then sold the company to Numrich Arms Corp.

Numrich Arms Corp. is a firm that deals in antique and obsolete gun parts for both military and civilian firearms. For several decades, Numrich through its subsidiary, The Gun Parts Co. (which controlled Auto-Ordnance), manufactured a limited number of brand new full-auto Thompson submachine guns for sale through NFA registered machine gun dealers. Numrich also developed semi-auto versions of the famous machine gun for sale without need for the NFA registration and accompanying paperwork.

In 1991, Numrich using the Auto-Ordnance brand name began marketing 1911 pistols in multiple models and calibers. In 1999, Kahr Arms purchased Auto-

Ordnance from Numrich and has continued production of the 1911 style handguns.

The Auto-Ordnance 1911 pistols manufactured prior to the company's purchase by Kahr experienced a mixed reaction from shooters and firearms commentators. Some questioned their quality (saying it was haphazard at best) while others raved over the value offered for a comparative, but substantially lower cost 1911 pistol.

The purchase by Kahr Arms, in my view, certainly improved things simply because Kahr has earned a great reputation for a well designed quality product. Besides being innovative, Kahr pistols are well made and reliable. The Kahr Micro MK40 in .40 S&W that I personally own is surprisingly accurate for such a small pistol in so potent a chambering. Additionally, it always works when fed good quality ammunition.

What I wanted to know was how good is the lowest cost Auto-Ordnance 1911 pistol, the Model 1911PKZ? Was this replica of the World War Two 1911A1 service pistol accurate, reliable and problem free?

THE ANSWER

The answer I found during an extensive testing period was, on the whole, quite positive, but there were a few problems which I will detail in a moment.

The Auto-Ordnance Model 1911PKZ is shipped in a hard plastic case together with a cable lock, one magazine, the warranty and an

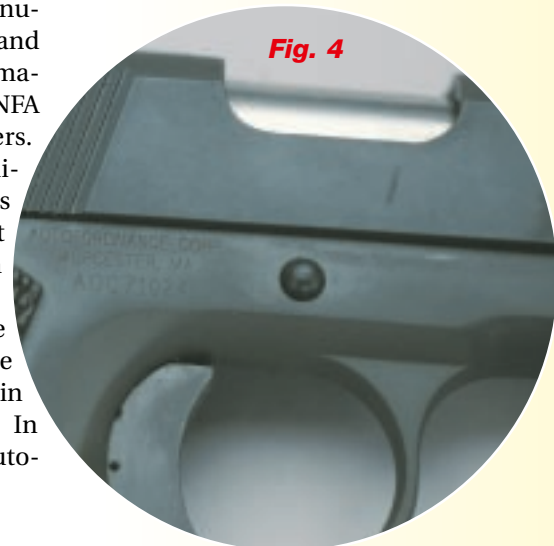


Fig. 4

Fig. 5

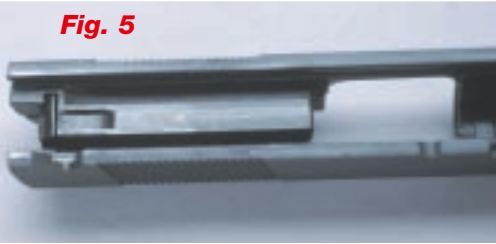


Fig. 7



Fig. 6



instruction book. As it comes from the box, the Model 1911PKZ resembles a typical military duty 1911A1 pistol from World War II (**Figure 1**). 1911 purists, and collectors, however, will note a number of differences between this gun and the guns made during the war.

First of all, the slide bears the legend "Model 1911A1 U.S. Army" on the left side (**Figure 2**). Any collector will quickly tell you this inscription is inaccurate and has no basis in fact. That being the case, it still establishes the origin and historical flavor of the pistol.

The finish on the Auto-Ordinance Model 1911PKZ is a dark gray Parkerizing (**Figure 3**). The frame and slide are manufactured from 4140 steel. The frame being an investment casting which is then machined on state-of-the-art CNC equipment, while the slide is machined from bar stock. Kahr Arms is actually a division of Saelio, which has been in the precision machining business since 1981 and has the experience and the modern tooling to build this historic handgun with modern manufacturing methods as opposed to the crude labor intensive methods required in the early 1940s.

Even though the Auto-Ordinance Model 1911PKZ has the appearance of a World War II pistol, numerous detailed differences are immediately noticeable to anyone even faintly familiar with the 1911 pistol. The ejection port on the Auto-Ordinance has been lowered (**Figure 4**) when compared to an original military pistol and the magazine well has been beveled on its bottom edges.

I genuinely believe it offers the consumer the best combination of low cost and good quality currently available.

This last feature does help the stress reload even though a small detail.

The barrel also has been throatened which should aid in the feeding of modern hollow point ammunition. However, the manual states that only 230-grain full metal jacket .45 ACP ammunition should be used in this pistol. I ignored this recommendation and for the most part got along fairly well. I say this because part of the test regimen for this pistol was to use it in a local IDPA match and while the gun ate hollow point ammunition without a problem on the practice range, it did fail to feed two Black Hills 230-

grain JHP rounds in the local match. Murphy's Law strikes again, and all that!

Throughout the entire test session with the Auto-Ordinance Model 1911 PKZ, I encountered only four failures over the course of shooting approximately 500 rounds in range sessions and the local IDPA match. Two of these four failures were the failure to feed the Black Hills hollow point ammo when the manual specifically warns against the use of such ammo. The barrel is parkerized with the hood and lug area being polished to a bright finish. Unfortunately, the throat has been left with its parkerized finish which does nothing to aid in the feeding of hollow point ammunition. The other two malfunctions will be explained in a moment.

One of the endearing aspects of this pistol that I found attractive almost immediately was the complete absence of any firing pin safety system like that introduced on the Series 80 Colt 1911 pistol (**Figure 5**). I realize lawsuit conscious managers were concerned over the escalating number of civil lawsuits and so instigated this abomination, but it is both interesting and enlightening that the FBI specifically prohibited such a sys-

tem when they set forth the specs on the FBI SWAT 1911 pistol a couple of years ago. Obviously, I am not the only one who prefers the safety systems originally designed by John Browning on the 1911 pistol. They can always be enhanced, but the original systems work quite well, thank you.

The grip panels on the test pistol were the checkered brown plastic that are so familiar to those of us who grew up on military 1911 pistols in our youth (**Figure 6**). The mainspring housing is arched and features the military required lanyard loop (**Figure 7**). I still prefer the



Fig. 8

**1911
PKZ**

range—the original front sight departed from the front of the slide for parts still unknown (Figure 9).

A call was made to Frank Harris at Kahr Arms, and his reply was both straight forward and honest. Yes, the loss of the front sight had been a problem plaguing the early production Auto-Ordnance 1911 pistols manufactured by Kahr Arms, but he thought my gun was late enough in the manufacturing process that this problem



Fig. 9

flat mainspring housing to the arched example, but I am neither a critic, nor a fan of lanyard loops. They have their uses—even in civilian applications, but most of my friends and acquaintances have over the years wasted no time grinding the lanyard loop off their respective pistols.

The sights on the Auto-Ordnance Model 1911PKZ mimic the military model in that they are small by modern standards, but in my view the rear sight blade offers a slightly wider rear notch, even if by the narrowest of definitions, than that found on a typical World War II 1911A1 pistol (Figure 8). The front sight originally was a plain blade, but it was the source of the third malfunction when—nearing the close of a test session on the

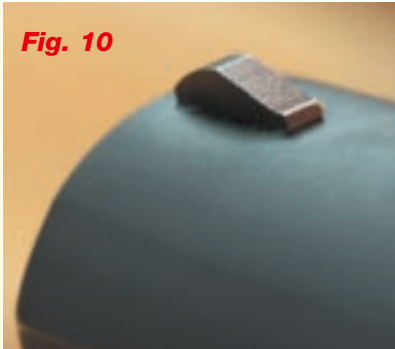


Fig. 10

should have been corrected. I sent the slide to the factory and in three days, the slide returned with a new front sight (Figure 10). This front sight featured the smallest of serrations and I must say it helped with my sight acquisition. Not having had any further communication with the Kahr Arms representatives I don't know if these serrations are now standard on Auto-Ordnance front sights.

The manual safety differs in detail from most of those seen on World War II production pistols in that it offers a long shelf like those seen on commercial post-war guns versus the hard to hit small knob found on war time production guns. The grip safety is the 'A1' version which is supposed to have been a big improvement in reducing hammer bite (Figure 11). It helps, but it has yet to eliminate the problem. The best grip safeties are any of the so called "beaver-tail" variety that truly do eliminate hammer bite.

The trigger differed considerably in detail from the war production 1911A1 pistols. First of all, it is long and its outside front edges are sharp while the face of the trigger on the test pistol was smooth. (Others have told me their Auto-Ordnance triggers came with serrated faces.) The trigger pull measured just over 5½ pounds which in this day and age is more than reasonable. The hammer is a wide model, but it has been shortened and it is not as long as those found on many pre-World War II guns (Figure 12). This is a blessing and another reason why I enjoyed working with this pistol. It didn't bite me



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

CHRONOGRAPH AND ACCURACY TEST

FIREARM: Auto-Ordnance 1911A1 US Army ■ MODEL: 1911PKZ
CALIBER: .45 ACP

AMMO MANUFACTURER, BULLET WT. & TYPE	RESULTS FOR 5 ROUNDS TESTED		
	Avg. Vel.	Ext. Spd.	Best Grp. (in.)
Winchester (White Box) 185-gr. FMJ BB	876	118	7.5
Cor Bon 200-gr. JHP	1,068	78	5.5
CCI Blazer 200-gr. JHP	930	26	4.5 w/1 flyer (2 4-rds)
Speer Lawman 230-gr. FMJ	826	34	3.25
Federal Hydra Shok 230-gr. HSHP	851	27	3.5 w/1 flyer (2.25 4-rds)
Speer Gold Dot 230-gr. GDHP	850	75	7 w/1 flyer (2.75 4-rds)



Fig. 13

nearly as bad as original World War II service pistols usually do.

Essentially, this pistol had everything I don't like on a 1911 pistol. It had a long trigger when I prefer a short one. It had the military A1 grip safety which I find almost as useless as the original shorter model. I prefer instead almost any of the after-market beavertail grip safeties currently available. It had the arched mainspring housing when I require the flat variety on all my guns and the sights were smaller and harder to see that those I normally work with from either Heinie or Novak. With its parkerized finish, it was certainly not going to win any beauty contests. Yet, despite all these shortcomings I found I could shoot this pistol both accurately and comfortably. The more I worked with the gun, the more I found I enjoyed shooting a pistol that offered little in the way of the extras we have come to expect in a well-made 1911

pistol, but it offered performance, especially so in terms of accuracy.

The accuracy of this pistol was an endearing trait that came as a total surprise. Did it shoot every round into a match-tight group? Of course not, like most pistols it preferred some loads over others, but with the possible exception of Winchester white box 185-grain BB ammo and Cor-Bon's 200-grain JHP it can truthfully be said it shot everything else I put through it better than I anticipated—by a wide margin.

It put five rounds of 230-grain FMJ, CCI Lawman ammunition into a group measuring 3.25 inch, center to center at a distance of 25 yards (Figure 13). This FMJ ammo was the first I shot during the accuracy test session and I was surprised to see a group this tight. Well, it got better. Next up was five rounds of Speer Gold Dot 230-grain hollow point ammo and, with the exception of one called flyer, four rounds measured 2.75 inches center to center. The fifth round opened the group up to seven inches, but believe me I know I jerked the trigger when I fired it. This was followed by Federal Hydra Shok and five rounds of 230-grain Hydra-Shok put four rounds into a group measuring 2.25 inches. Again a called flyer due to a jerked trigger, but

even then the fifth shot only opened the whole group up to 3.5 inches, center to center. Plainly, this pistol was more accurate than I had expected and worked well throughout the test session, except for the IDPA match.

SHOOTING IN COMPETITION

Combining the Auto-Ordnance Model 1911 PKZ pistol with an Uncle Mike's kydex holster just seemed the natural thing to do for a local IDPA match. Both products from two different companies represent good quality merchandise for the dollar. For spare magazines, Chip McCormick provided his eight shot Power-Mag, which is the magazine preferred by those who want to use the best magazine available for their .45 caliber 1911 pistols.

It should be mentioned the Auto-Ordnance Model 1911PKZ was shipped with only one 7-round magazine, it being a Metalform magazine with a flat shelf follower and a removable metal base plate (Figure 14). Auto-Ordnance offers as optional accessories three different magazines; a blued non-removable base plate model, a parkerized non-removable base plate model and the parkerized removable base plate model that came with the test pistol. All three models have the same suggested retail price of \$31.



Fig. 14

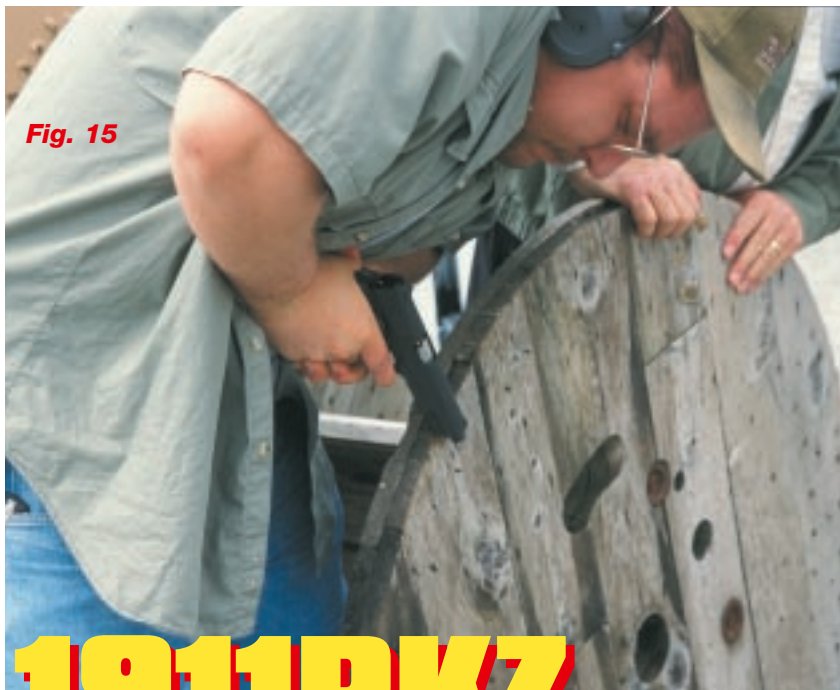


Fig. 15

1911PKZ

SHOOTING THE LOCAL IDPA MATCH

The match consisted of three simple stages and the first two went well. I had to make two head shots at one point and much to my surprise; I accomplished the task quickly, easily and accurately. Even though my experience with the pistol by this point was fairly extensive, this feat made my confidence in the test pistol soar. The majority of my hits throughout the first two stages were A-hits and I even managed to find the magazine well opening with the minimum amount of fumbling during a reload with retention. (I learned quite quickly the lanyard loop can work as a 'stop' so to speak as you present the fresh magazine to the mag well opening during the reload.)

The truth is I was having a blast with the test pistol throughout the match until the middle of the last stage when the slide froze in a partially opened condition after firing the last round from the magazine. Dan Settlege the range officer stopped the action and attempted to help me clear the pistol (**Figure 15**). It

was to no avail. The gun was frozen tight. I sus-

pected a number of causes, all of them major in degree, but the truth is the cause was quite simple. Later Steve Snyder, my local gunsmith, simply tapped on the muzzle of the barrel with a plastic hammer while stoutly pushing the slide in the opposite direction to free the action.

Examination revealed no damage or broken components in the action. What we did find was a small sliver of steel atop the lock-

I was having a blast with the test pistol throughout the match.

NOTE FROM KAHR ARMS

ing lugs on the barrel that had sheared off the lug recesses in the slide and the cause was readily apparent. During the manufacturing process someone had polished the hood of the barrel quite aggressively and had unintentionally rounded the tops of the locking lugs to a dome-like profile. Without a straight edge to the locking lugs, they had induced wear on the lock-

ing lug recesses and caused the sliver to separate from the slide. It then had been caught in just the right location to tie up the action and freeze the slide in place. The remedy is quite simple. The gun simply needs a barrel without rounded locking lugs.

Did this last fact lessen my enthusiasm for the pistol? No, it didn't. I still like the Auto-Ordnance Model 1911PKZ because I genuinely believe it offers the consumer the best combination of low cost and good quality currently available on the market. I know there are other 1911 pistols that feature better components in terms of fit or extras or even durability, but they all cost significantly more. The Auto-Ordnance Model 1911PKZ has a suggested retail price of \$515, but many distributors are offering these pistols at a substantially lower cost than any of its American made competitors. I like .45 caliber auto-pistols and I still like this pistol. After they repair the barrel, I'm going to purchase it and leave it as it is. I like this gun enough that I'm going to keep it around simply because I do believe it is a good dollar value. I can't recommend it any higher than to say simply I had fun with this pistol. ■

SOURCES

Kahr Arms/Auto-Ordnance

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(eight round Power Mags)