Few police departments considering conversion from service revolvers to semi-automatic pistols have the time or budgets to conduct more than cursory analyses of available pistol designs and models. To assist the law enforcement community in this regard, NRA's Law Enforcement Activities Division has developed a seminar program that allows ready semi-auto pistol evaluation and comparison within an educational framework. The first NRA Semi-Automatic Pistol Seminar was held at the U.S. Marine Base, Quantico, Va., Oct. 4-9. I was assigned to cover the seminar activities.
Police departments across the nation are turning in their familiar revolvers for semi-automatic pistols.

To assist in this transition, the NRA has launched a series of seminars dedicated to . . .

Law enforcement’s response to this first seminar was immediate. The class was filled a month before I arrived at the indoor pistol range at Quantico’s Weapons Training Battalion. Most of my classmates were active-duty officers from federal, state or local agencies. Lawmen from New York’s rubbing shoulders with those from Florida or Pennsylvania. Federal agents from the FBI or DEA were seated next to officers from small town police departments. Experience with semi-automatic pistols varied widely through this class, with the majority claiming only a casual familiarity with this firearm type.

After a welcome by Col. J. W. Wilkins, commanding officer of the Weapons Training Battalion, matters quickly were organized by John Recknor, manager of the NRA’s Security Firearms Training Dept. Assisted by Chuck Julian and other NRA instructors, Recknor smoothly ushered the class into the beginning of what proved to be a challenging, fast-paced week.

Leading off the classroom segment of our instruction, Recknor stressed that safety would be the most important lesson we could follow, both in class and range. He then passed our keeping into the able hands of Emanuel Kapelsohn, a private firearms consultant who outlined the general schedule for us. Mornings would be devoted to indoor familiarization with a different manufacturer’s products, with afternoons earmarked for range time. Each of us would be allowed to shoot 100 rounds through a pistol daily as part of the training process.

By Doug Wicklell

Instructor Emanuel Kapelsohn (r.) makes point about the Weaver stance at the seminar. Time was available for some informal instruction.

SELECTING THE POLICE PISTOL

SELECTING THE POLICE PISTOL?
Many cuts and minor abrasions resulted when shooters tried forcing down stiff magazine springs for reloading drills.

Part of the NRA's presentation of the semi-automatic in a seminar format dealt with a major reservation raised against the semi-auto pistol in law enforcement work: the need for specialized training. The fundamentals of a good transitional revolver to semi-automatic training program were part of the material presented to the class for future reference. Approximately 80% of class members were individuals whose organizations were considering the shift to semi-autos in the immediate future, and the majority of those I later talked with consistently considered training "dedicated" to a specific pistol to be the "make-or-break-it" foundation for the transition. Concluding with a discussion of the range exercises that would be held throughout the next week, the inaugural class was dismissed to prepare for the next day.

**DAY ONE:**

![Beretta Image](image_url)

**BERETTA**

Not surprisingly, everyone was on hand bright and early to await the first manufacturer, Beretta, USA. Warren Barron, the Beretta factory representative, began his presentation with a brief historical sketch of the development of Beretta from a family business centuries ago in Italy to the introduction of the latest Beretta pistol that has been adopted by the U.S. Armed Services as the M9 pistol.

The Beretta 92SB, an earlier counterpart to the M9s in current production, has been adopted by the Connecticut and Wyoming State Police, the South Dakota Highway Patrol, and even the Texas Rangers.

Part of our familiarization exercises indoors with the Berettas involved field-stripping the pistols down to basic sub-assemblies and reassembly, question and answer sessions with the factory representative regarding armorer training, and preventive maintenance and dry-fire exercises to acquaint ourselves with safe operation procedures. While the Beretta presented no reassembly problems, initial attempts at disassembly by some class members met with inadvertent "haunchings" of recoil spring guides, a mishap which grew less frequent as we continued to take the pistols apart and put them back together.

After an adjournment for lunch, class convened at the range. Two by two the group was separated into shooter/coach partnerships that would last the rest of the afternoon. Beginning with a series of range familiarization drills with empty pistols, all course participants were in turn allowed to dry-fire the Beretta over the different distances of the NRA Law Enforcement Course. As a safety precaution, all pistols were double-checked by both shooter and coach prior to transfer from person to person and at various points during the drills.

During the afternoon range exercises, a variety of simulated malfunctions were created by interposing empty cartridge cases between slides and barrel junctures, allowing class members to practice "jam" clearing techniques by the application of methods taught in the classroom (see box).

Finally, each shooter was issued 130 rounds of 9 mm ammunition and the live-firing practice drills began. Following the course of fire outlined in the "NRA Law Enforcement Course Handgun Proficiency Test," each shooter fired at distances of three, seven, and 15 yds., initially with no time limit, then under the official time restrictions. Kapelsohn circulated through the class, reemphasizing the importance of realistic practice and reminding shooters, "If you make a mistake on the range, you'll probably end up repeating it on the street."

One difference common to double-action pistols like the Beretta that presented a concern was the transition from a long, heavy DA trigger pull on the first shot to a relatively short and light second shot pull. Early in many shooters were seen compensating for the DA pull by allowing their trigger fingers to rebound to the front of the guard, then jerking backwards to get a "running start" on the pull.

**DAY TWO:**

![Heckler & Koch Image](image_url)

**HECKLER & KOCH**

With many participants complaining of sore backs after policing up the empty brass left after the first day's shooting, the class returned the next morning to learn about the next manufacturer, Heckler & Koch. Jim Schatz, an HK training representative, had brought a wide selection of his firm's firearms to the class, including a stainless steel prototype P7 pistol in .45 ACP. Introducing the P7 pistol that we would later shoot in an 8- or 13-shot configuration, Schatz informed the group that the "squeeze-cocking" P7 in 9 mm was only a part of the HK lineup of products available to law enforcement agencies.

Unlike the Beretta, the P7 features a fixed barrel, but the most radical departure from more conventional semi-auto pistol designs is the cocking lever in the front strap of the frame. Requiring approximately 10-12 lbs. to draw to a cocked position, the squeeze-cocking lever can then be held in place with only a light pressure of the firing.
The Beretta 92SB, an earlier counterpart to the M9s in current production, has been adopted by the Connecticut and Wyoming State Police, the South Dakota Highway Patrol, and even the Texas Rangers.

Part of our familiarization exercises involved the Berettas involved field stripping the pistols to basic sub-assemblies and reassembly, specifi- cation and answer sessions with the factory representative regarding ar- moreering, and preventive main- tenance and dry fire exercises ac- quainted ourselves with safe operation procedures. While the Orpiment pre- sented no reasurably problems, ini- tial attempts at disassembly by some class members met with inadvertent “blindings” of recoil spring guides, a mishap which grew less frequent as we continued to take the pistols apart and put them back together.

After several days of class, lunch reconvened at the range. Two by two the group was assembled in shooting coach/partnerships that would last the rest of the afternoon. Begin- ning with a series of range familiar- ization drills with empty pistols, all course participants were in for an allow- ed-to-dry-fire the Beretta over the different distances of the NRA Law Enforcement Course. As a safety pre- caution, all pistols were double- checked by both shooter and coaches prior to transfer from person to person and at various points during the drills.

During the afternoon range exer- cises, a variety of simulated malfunc- tions were created by interposing empty cartridge cases between slides and barrel junctions, allowing the ber- car to practice “jam clearing” tech- niques by the application of methods taught in the class.

Finally each shooter was issued 130 rounds and allowed to participate in live-fire practice drills begun. Following the course of fire outlined in the “NRA Law Enforcement Course Handgun Proficiency Test,” each shooter fired at distances of 25, 35, and 50 yards, initially with no time limit, then under the official time restrictions.

Some others had second thoughts about the large caliber being to fire the smaller bore guns of 9 mm ammunition and .45’s, and it seemed to alleviate the problem slightly. After firing 60 rounds in close proximity to the range, however, the gas cylinder region of my HK pistol radiated palpable heat but could still be handled and handled safely.

Feeding equally well from maga- zines studded with round-nose or hol- low-point ammunition, the HK pistols ran up a nice score for range func- tion. No malfunctions were re- ported by any class members, despite more than 5,000 rounds of 9 mm being expended. Loading the HK maga- zines, however, turned out to be an ocassional, with many shooters expe- rience minor malfunctions or feed issues from the strong springs in the last round or two.

**HECKLER & KOCH**

With many participants complain- ing of sore backs after polishing up the empty brass left after the first day’s shooting, the class returned the next morning to learn about the next manu- facturer, Heckler & Koch. Jim Schubel, an HK training representative, had brought a wide selection of his firm’s firearms to the class, including the recently released P7 pistol in 45 ACP. Introduced and checked, both the cham- bers and magazines, before shooters were allowed downrange for target inspections and changes.

Historically, HK model pistols were furnished by the manufacturer because of “generic” holster required for the particular model. The 9mm P7 is large to retain a P7 pistol safely. He was one of the few law enforcement suppliers that had commissioned a private holstermaker to produce its product.

The P7 features a heat shield located in the upper trigger guard. It was incorporated because of reports of excessive heat being radiated to the trigger guard. After firing 60 rounds of 9 mm ammunition and .45’s, and it seemed to alleviate the problem slightly. After firing 60 rounds in close proximity to the range, however, the gas cylinder region of my HK pistol radiated palpable heat but could still be handled and handled safely.

**SMITH & WESSON**

Gerry Smith of Smith & Wesson was on hand early enough to field preliminary questions from seminar members. Smith, a former police officer, has served on the FBI’s Quantico range of class’s inspection at least one of each of the double-action semi-auto current- ly manufactured by his firm. Stainless steel was represented by the trigger guards. Smith & Wesson 1911A1 9mm, 459, 459, 460 and 462, while black bleed pistols like the Models 459, 459, and 469 were available for viewing.

**AMERICAN RIFLEMAN**

Officer Stephen D. Mastin of the Fredericksburg, Va., Police Department prepares to fire another magazine in a wall-mounted gun with the HK P7M8 9 mm pistol. This “squeeze-cocker” pistol has been adopted by the N.J. State Police.
Selecting Police Pistol

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barricade kneeling point and began to fire my last 12 shots. Then my pistol began to drop its magazine after each shot. Quickly reminded by John Recknor that in combat situations there is no armor on cell, I continued as best I could, holding the magazine in place with one hand while firing with the other. After the stage, I discovered the magazine catch nut had sheared. I wasn’t the only one with troubles—two points down in the firing line a fellow shooter had watched his ambidexterous safety lever fall off.

The scattered malfunctions we experienced were for the most part due to tight slides and frames, and as the day went on and as the pistols wore in, the malfunction rate decreased. Smith offered me the use of a stainless 639 for the second course of fire, and this pistol functioned flawlessly.

DAY FOUR:

SIGARMS

The fourth firm at the seminar was Sigarms, whose representative Brian Felter quickly passed out P226 9 mm pistols and launched us into our training. As a former Maryland K-9 officer, Felter was able to parlay his own law enforcement experiences into a job with Sigarms as manager of training, admitting to the class, “I did pretty good for a man who had gone to the dogs.”

Introducing the Sig P226 pistol, Felter demonstrated the correct procedures for loading, unloading and safely holstering this double-action handgun. Featuring a frame-mounted decocking lever, the P226 has no external safeties. Also on hand for examination during class breaks were other Sigarms products including the compact P220, P225 and P230 pistols.

While many other features attracted attention during class breaks, the new short trigger available for the P226 as well as the optional “K-Coat” finish on the display handguns ensured that there was always a good crowd seeking further “hands-on” experience. The short trigger offered a cutback grip surface increasing mechanical advantage and lessening the trigger pull.

Returning to the range in the afternoon for our session with Sigarms, the coach and shooter teams progressed through the dry-firing drills with careful monitoring from the NRA staff personnel giving range commands and support. With each new pistol, attention was given to new features. For the Sig P226, placing a pistol on “safe” required operation of the decocker lever, allowing the hammer to be lowered safely. Since the P226 has no external safety mechanisms, holsters and drawing drills emphasized the importance of keeping one’s trigger finger outside the guard.

Firing the NRA course with a well-used P226, I experienced a number of magazine malfunctions in which the slide failed to hold open after the last shot. This problem was resolved by switching magazines—all factory representatives seemed well-supplied with spare magazines. Some class members had difficulties with a light, 95-gr. bullet load that often failed to feed correctly and presented ejection problems as well.

Reequipped with a brace of good magazines, I fired a 284×300 over the NRA course. My partner in shooting, Bob Dake, of the New York State Dept. of Conservation, also mustered a high score with the P226. Many class members attributed their good scores to the low-profile, high visibility sights furnished on the Sig pistols that worked well on the TQ-15 targets at all ranges.

One unexpected benefit of having the manufacturer’s representatives on hand for both classroom as well as range instruction was that they could gain direct feedback from shooters after each course of fire. All the reps knew their products well and could quickly diagnose specific ills and suggest strategies that would result in improved functioning.

DAY FIVE:

GLOCK

Throughout the first days of the seminar, many classmates indicated they were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Glock 17 pistol in class. Finally, on the last day, we were met by Glock representatives, Karl Walter and Dick Egolf.

While we disassembled the Glock’s frame, steel barrel and slide, along with the internal components down to the last pin and piece by using only a pin punch, Walter kept up a running commentary on disassembly procedures, periodically assisting individuals throughout the classroom. Even though the Glock 17 was the only pistol that was completely detail-striped in the course of the seminar, many law enforcement officers felt the easy procedure would contribute greatly to preventive maintenance.

Originally designed for the Austrian Army in 1982, the Glock 17 passed through a number of military trials to become the issue sidearm for the Austrian Army and the current choice of the Dade County, Fla., police department. While the basic Glock 17 was provided for classroom exercises, two prototype pistols—one designed as a compact version and one a full-blown target model with muzzle compensator and target trigger—were on display.

Neatly packaged in a waterproof polymer box, the Glock 17 features a passive trigger safety lever located in the center of the trigger that is activated on contact. Removing the trigger finger renders the Glock 17 “safe” without having to depress additional levers as in the other pistols covered earlier in the seminar.

Firing the Glock at the afternoon range exercises proved to be an easy task. Despite its light weight, the Glock seemed to have the lightest recoil of any of the tested pistols, even firing a “hot” 9 mm load intended for use in carbines. Feeding the 17-round magazines with ammunition was made easier by the Glock magazine loading tool included with each pistol.

Changing the lightweight magazines proved to be the only weak point of the Glock 17. Pushing the magazine release sometimes resulted in the empty magazine staying in the well without enough mass to drop clear. Shooters quickly resorted to a modified punch-the-catch-then-rip-the-magazine-clear-ditch which worked well.

Before seminar participants had a chance to escape back to their respective duties, I circulated a questionnaire among the group. To a man, the assembled officers felt the NRA had once again provided a valuable training experience that would figure prominently in their agencies’ transition considerations.

Classmates I spoke to cited the professional range and classroom instruction and intense atmosphere of interaction and evaluation as being among the most valuable features of the seminar.

Future “semi-auto” schools are planned for various locations throughout the country. For more information on attending one of these seminars, contact NRA Law Enforcement Activities Division, 1600 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.