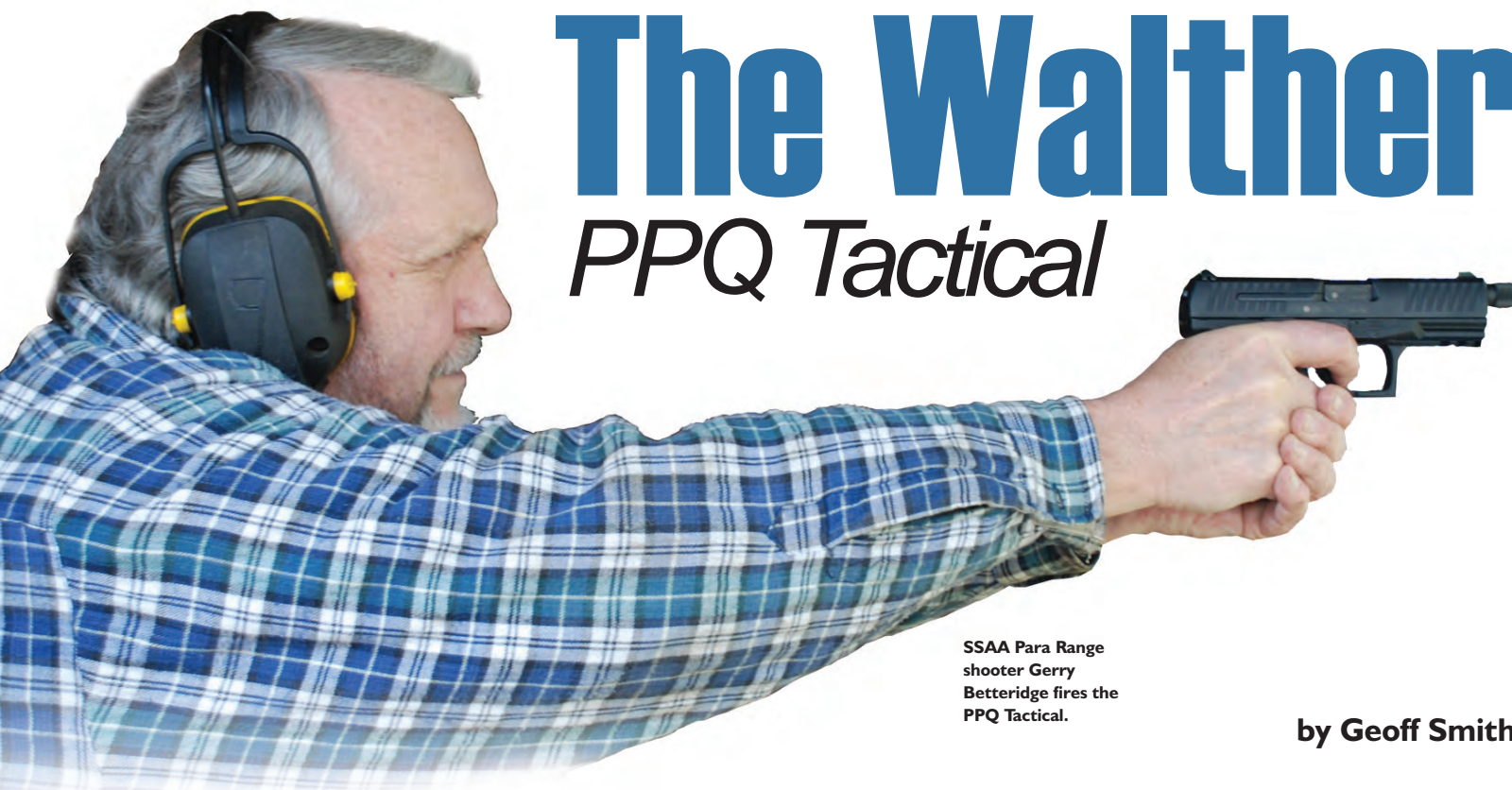


The Walther

PPQ Tactical



**SSAA Para Range
shooter Gerry
Betteridge fires the
PPQ Tactical.**

by Geoff Smith

The designers at Carl Walther GmbH undoubtedly have its collective eye on the ball when it comes to innovation. Released to the United States market at the 2011 SHOT Show, Walther's remarkable 9mmx19 PPQ Tactical model handgun is supplied in a neat, foam-lined black plastic box that includes a spare magazine, magazine loader and three alternative grip backstraps to suit various hand sizes, as well as a comprehensive multilingual manual.

Released in Australia by distributor Frontier Arms in early 2012, the local version differs slightly from the model described on Walther's website (www.carl-walther.de) because of our restrictions on barrel length and magazine capacity. The handgun's main features for our model are a 10-round capacity, a 120mm barrel and a black steel slide and barrel with a polymer frame.

It is distinctly light in weight, our version tipping my scales at 696g unloaded with the magazine in place, and is 197mm in length and

135mm in height. By way of comparison, at 956g, the earlier Walther P-38 weighs nearly half as much again. However, while the PPQ Tactical is designed to fulfil much the same role as the P-38, it is definitely more of a tactical-looking action-type pistol than a target job, and it fills this role admirably.

So, I hear you ask, exactly what is it that leads me to call this gun 'remarkable'? In truth, there is no one single thing, save for the fact that this is probably the most strikingly simple self-loading handgun I've ever seen. The design doubtless borrows from many sources. It uses Browning's short recoil system, Glock's style of breechblock locking up and hammerless construction, and the concept of pressed, hardened steel inserts in a polymer frame that is increasingly coming into use in various other makes. In more abstract ways, I was also reminded of Heckler & Koch and CZ, and even this gun's great-grandfather, the Walther P-38. Yet, this gun is certainly no clone of anything else, even including the Walther P-99, which is

said to be this one's predecessor.

Complementing its simplicity, the PPQ Tactical's ergonomically designed grip just feels and points 'right'. First impressions from half a dozen randomly chosen shooting mates were that the pistol felt very comfortable and 'pointable'.

Its key features include the ambidextrous slide release and magazine release levers, the Picatinny rail under the muzzle (for attaching lights or laser sights) and above all, the extremely simple take-down process. The slide release pivots on the same pin as the broad polymer trigger. The gun comes apart very simply into five major bits: the slide, barrel, recoil spring, frame and magazine. There are no levers to pull out and no special positions to which the slide must be shifted; one simply removes the magazine, dry-fires the action (after checking the chamber, of course), and by lowering the take-down catch, the slide and barrel slip forwards, off the frame. The recoil spring is then pulled from the barrel and the



barrel drops out of the slide.

The minor complication in Australia is that the supplied barrel has to make our 120mm minimum length and so the pistol has a threaded muzzle with a cap that must be unscrewed to enable it to be slipped out of the slide. Reassembly is also simple; the above process is reversed. Walther has even color-coded the recoil spring, with the breech end bright blue, so there can be no confusion about which way it goes back together!

Upon looking more closely, we find that there are some interesting safety features. There is no safety catch as such, but there is a firing pin block to prevent unintended discharge, should the gun be dropped when loaded. The wide polymer trigger has a safety built in, in the form of an inner trigger lever, which must be depressed to unlock the trigger proper, before the triggerbar can operate the sear mechanism.

The trigger has two stages. The first stage requires slightly more than 3lb (14.9N). Once this is overcome, the trigger reaches its operating position, at which point, a force of just more than 5lb (22.3N) releases the sear and fires the gun. It has minimal creep and in my opinion, while some other makes employing

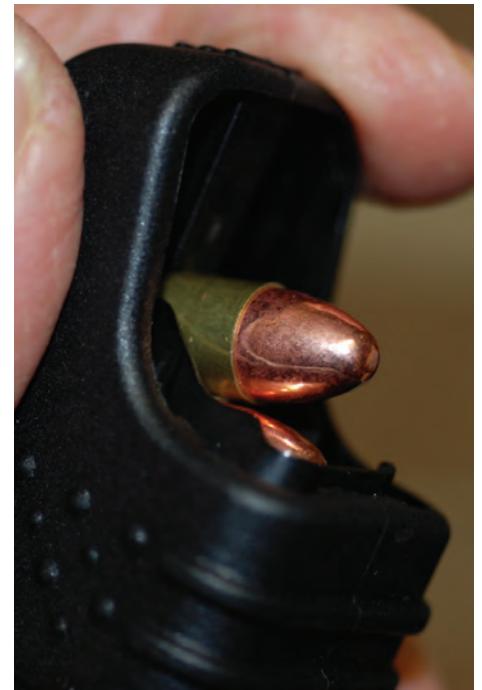
The Walther PPQ Tactical, below, with its great-grandfather, Walther's famous P-38.



The trigger is wide and has an inner safety lever, which prevents movement of the trigger proper until depressed.

plastic triggers take a bit of getting used to, this one is quite outstanding.

There is a loaded chamber indicator within the lower edge of the extractor slot behind the ejection port. When a round is present in the chamber, the forward end of the extractor 'clicks' into the extraction groove of the case. The rear end then tips into the slide far enough



The gun is supplied with a polymer loader and aid, which slips over the magazine to make insertion of cartridges less effort on the fingers.

that the red indicator becomes visible when viewed from above.

The finish on the steel components closely matches that of the polymer frame, being satin black. According to the literature, the barrel and the slide are treated with the Tenifer process. Reference to Wikipedia reveals that

Tenifer is one of several proprietary 'ferritic nitrocarburizing' processes that confer scuff, corrosion and wear-resistance to carbon steel surfaces. It's a form of case-hardening employing an alkali cyanate salt bath at just less than 600C. Variations of this general process are now apparently in common usage by several European firearms manufacturers.

The removable grip backstrap is held in place with a roll pin, whose hollow can be used to attach a lanyard if required. On checking the backstrap replacing system, I noticed the words 'Transponder' and 'Kennung', which raised my curiosity somewhat. According to my German dictionary, 'kennung' means 'signal'.

On further investigation, it seems that a passive radio frequency identification device (RFID), similar to that used for microchipping dogs, can be inserted into the frame of the gun as a means of identification. This could be a major selling point for law enforcement and security agencies that need to keep track of their firearms. It certainly raised a few anxious queries though in the US, where paranoia about 'big brother' looms large when any form of gun control is mentioned. The fears are unfounded, of course, as the gun merely possesses a niche into which such devices may, if desired, be placed. Notwithstanding this, in the US, it is possible to obtain PPQs from which even the reference to this feature has been removed.

The barrel and recoil spring assembly. The barrel has a threaded collar on the muzzle and the recoil spring is color-coded to ensure correct reassembly.



The Walther PPQ Tactical as supplied in its case.

While in 'translation mode' the words '!Warnhinweise beachten' in small print on the left-hand side rear of the frame also sparked my curiosity. This roughly translates to 'be aware of the safety instructions'.

Unlike the original model, which has a double-stacking 15-round magazine, our version is supplied with two 10-round single-stack magazines that are stamped 'Made in Italy'. I understand that Walther has subcontracted the manufacture of the smaller-capacity magazines to an Italian firm for markets such as ours, where magazine capacity is legally restricted.

Made of blackened steel with a polymer

base plug and follower and a substantial coil spring, the magazines have windows in the right-hand side to indicate five and 10 rounds. The supplied magazine loader is actually marked 'Walther P99'. Although most fit, young shooters wouldn't bother with using it to fill their magazines (preferring to just thumb the cartridges straight in), it does work very effectively and is of use to us older shooters, where finger strength is limited by arthritis or whatever.

The overall design of the glass fibre filled polymer frame amalgamates simplicity with

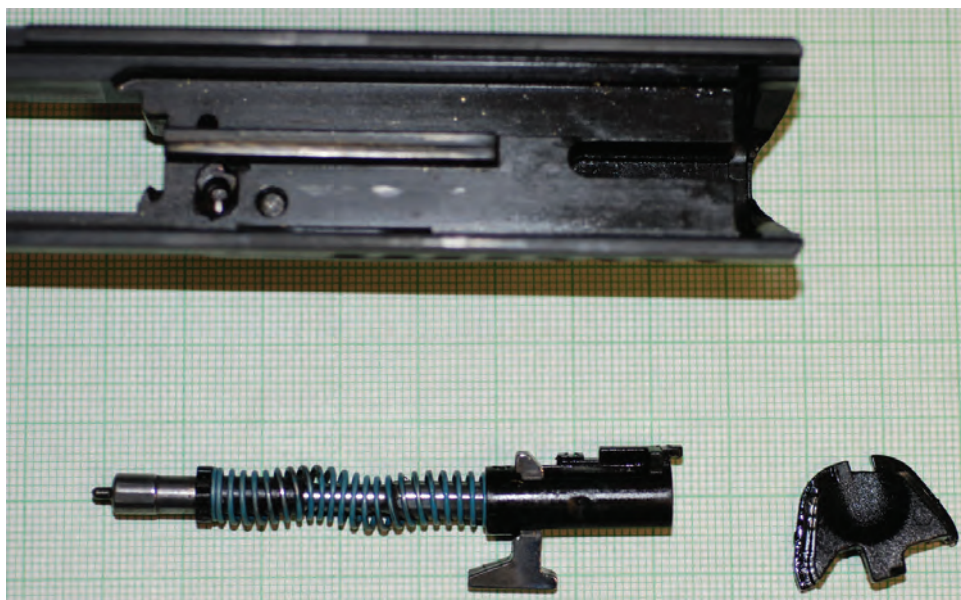


ergonomics. The triggerguard is recurved at the front because the gun is designed for two-handed use. The magazine release is incorporated ambidextrously into the profile of the triggerguard immediately behind the trigger, enabling the magazine to be dropped by thumbing down on the catch with the non-shooting hand. It can also be operated with the trigger finger and it is long enough that minimal force is needed. The magazine well is slightly funnelled, so that insertion of the new magazine is achieved quickly and positively. With the ambidextrous slide release, the slide can be dropped at the instant the magazine clicks home. All in all, the frame design enables very fast operation.

The fixed sights employ three 3mm luminescent dots, with two on the rear and one on the front. Although 'fixed', the rear-sight, which is dovetailed into the slide, can be drifted laterally to adjust for windage. The front-sight, which screws into the top of the slide from beneath, can be replaced with higher or lower ones as needed to adjust for elevation.

Replacement front-sight blades are available from Frontier Arms. The instruction manual suggests that a special tool (I assume

The striker assembly, end-cap and underside of the slide. The projecting tag from the striker slides back in the slot during cocking, where it is held by the sear until released when firing.



a form of screw clamp) is both available and recommended to adjust the rear-sight. Although, with care, judicious use of a non-marring drift punch and small hammer would also work effectively.

The internal working parts, like those already described, continue the theme of simplicity. The striker mechanism fits neatly into a cylindrical hole bored into the breechblock, with the lug that engages the sear protruding below from a slot, milled into the above hole. Cocking the striker is achieved by pulling the slide backwards

The underside of the front section of the frame, showing the Picatinny rail and recurved triggerguard. The ambidextrous magazine release is immediately below the trigger on each side of the triggerguard. The trigger and slide release levers all pivot on the same pin above the trigger, while the take-down catch is immediately in front of the trigger pivot pin.



After field-stripping, the gun breaks down into five main parts: the slide, barrel, recoil spring, frame and magazine.

for a mere 9mm. Squeezing the trigger then shifts the trigger bar backwards to lower the sear and release the striker to fire the gun. The barrel and slide are locked together initially and as they recoil together, the angled slot in the bottom of the barrel immediately below the breech engages the ramp in the frame, pulling the barrel downwards and unlocking it from the slide, which continues backwards until the fired case is ejected.

In full recoil position, with the slide locked back, the barrel is noticeably tilted downwards. The ejector sits above the left rear corner of the magazine and causes the empty case to spin back over the shooter's head. Once the slide has fully recoiled, it is returned to battery by the recoil spring, during which travel it picks up a new cartridge from the magazine, pushes it into the chamber and finally locks the barrel and slide back together in readiness for the next shot. Once the last round is fired, the magazine follower lifts the slide release lever via the slot on the top left of the magazine, so that the slide locks open.

In the process of testing this handgun, I fired a variety of handloads with AP50, AP70 and AP100 powder, driving 124- and 135-grain Berry projectiles, as well as some Winchester factory loads. The velocities of these loads

With the slide locked back, the tilt of the barrel is distinctive.



varied from just less than 1000fps to 1250fps and the gun cycled perfectly. It is a lively piece of hardware, as one might expect from its light weight, and it is certainly great fun to shoot.

The supplied factory target with a 40mm grouping at 15m range (which equates to 9.2 MOA) shows that the gun should be capable of at least 67mm grouping at 25. My tests included a number of both rested and offhand groups, and the accuracy achieved was consistent with the factory target. I would have liked to have had access to the gun for a little longer and

One of the five-shot groups shot offhand with the PPQ Tactical.

perhaps used it in a match or two, but I am nevertheless satisfied that it is a very acceptable handgun. The worst aspect for me was the fact that I had to hand it back to Frontier Arms!

The Walther PPQ Tactical in 9mm is currently available from most good gunshops with a recommended retail price in the vicinity of \$1000. For more information, visit www.frontierarms.com.au ■



Specifications

Manufacturer: Carl Walther GmbH

Model: PPQ

Distributor: Frontier Arms

Action: Recoil-operated self-loading

Calibre: 9mmx19

Barrel Length: 120mm

Overall Length: 198mm

Weight: 700g

Trigger: Pre-loaded striker system, 2500g pull weight

Magazine: Two 10-round single-stack magazines supplied

Sights: High-visibility with phosphor three-dot system

RRP: \$1000