

ROCK RIVER VS. WILSON COMBAT

By: George Hill



It's a dark and stormy night. A heavy rain pours sheets of water across your windshield as you pull into your driveway. In the flash from a bolt of lightning, you see that the front door to your home is open; and through the window of your castle, you see the silhouette of a stranger. You exit your vehicle, and as you shut the door, you hear the crash of thunder and the shattering of something fragile from inside your house. You open your bag and pull out your Wilson Combat Professional. No, the Rock River Pro Carry... You can't decide.

ROCK RIVER PRO CARRY AND WILSON COMBAT PROFESSIONAL SPECS

MODEL	Rock River	Wilson
Caliber	.45 ACP	.45 ACP
Barrel Length	5.00 in.	4.10 in.
Overall Length	8 5/8 in.	7 7/8 in.
Height	5 3/4 in.	5 3/4 in.
Weight	42 oz.	36 oz.
Magazine Capacity	8	8

While you are trying to decide, the bad guy escapes out of the back with your Maltese Falcon. You don't care either, because you're standing there holding both guns and you forgot the reason you pulled them out in the first place, as you admire how the rain just runs off of the Professional's finish and how the Rock River gleams menacingly when wet.

Okay, I'm stretching for ideas here, scrambling up a beachhead of slick rocks that have been polished smooth by waves of articles written about custom 1911s.

What more can I say that hasn't already been said about guns just like these?

One of the problems I'm having with this issue's review is that both of these guns are just too damn good. Looking at them with a critical eye, it's difficult to point out anything wrong with them. I have a Wilson Combat Professional and a Rock River Pro Carry over here. The Wilson is a black and gray, Commander length gun with night sights, checkering on the front and back straps and very cool looking

laminated grips. The barrel is a bushingless bull design. The Rock River is a more traditional 1911 with night sights, a beaver tail and a commander style hammer. It sports additional checkering, rosewood grips and a Kart match grade barrel.

Both pistols have ramp style, snag-free night sights. While I'm not big on the ramp style, night sights are probably the most important feature of any handgun intended for serious defense use. If you have a gun that is marketed as such, and it doesn't come with night sights, then it is just that--marketing. That is something that I just can't compromise on. Cough, cough, HK, cough... Sorry about that, something got caught in my throat. Excuse me. If you are going to use your handgun in a defensive situation, it is most likely going to be after dark or in low light. In that situation, you are going to really need to know where your front sight post is. Most sights seem to disappear when it starts getting dim outside. A tiny little tritium insert can make all the difference, the difference between life and death. If your chosen carry gun doesn't have them, then plan on getting them installed. If you are buying a new gun, order one with



Rock River Pro Carry



Wilson Combat Professional

the sights on them. If your shop can't get them, then go to a different shop that can. No compromises.

I've already spent way more money on ammunition for these two pistols than what I will make for writing the article, and I am afraid that I'm going to have to buy more ammo for these hungry .45s. Their empty chambers cry for more rounds like a nest of baby birds, forever begging for more and more. It's like a crazy Orwellian nightmare. These guns beg to be fired and I'm afraid I'm going to go broke answering their calls.

What makes these guns so good? In a previous article about the Wilson Combat SDS pistol, I talked about the Armor-Tuff finish. The Professional model uses the same finish, but does it in a handsome, black and gray, two-tone finish. The Commander's slide length makes it ideal for concealed carry readers. Also, like the SDS, this gun is expensive, but it is worth every single penny.

The Rock River has a nice blued finish that contrasts with the gorgeous rosewood grips. The five inch barrel gives this gun a standard "Government Model" length. While longer than ideal, one can carry this concealed with little extra effort. This is the traditional size of the 1911 pistol, the original cut, the way John M. Browning designed it.

In my mind, the 1911 is not a perfect handgun. While the design is brilliant

Continued on page 20





Rock River Pro Carry

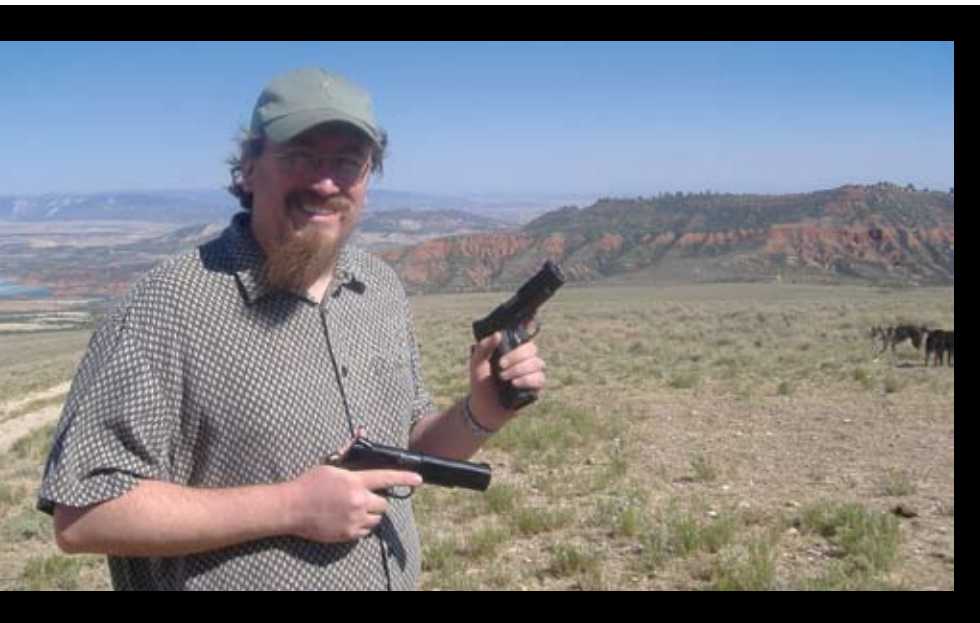
and the product of pure genius, it has... [Oh man, I thought I took some heat criticizing the HK. This is going to get me into some hot water here with the 1911 purists.] It has some parts that are less than ideal. For example, the shortened guide rod for the recoil spring, the plunger and the bushing. Browning fixes these in the High Power, which came out in 1935. Wilson fixes this by using a more modern recoil system with a full-length guide rod and a bull barrel that matches up to the slide itself, instead of the bushing. This makes for a gun that is a bit easier to field strip, while insuring accuracy.

Another thing that has always bothered me about 1911s is the barrel link. At the time, this was a very clever way of getting the barrel to move exactly how Browning wanted it to move, to come back during

recoil and unlock from the slide. But it is actually a tricky part when it comes to fitting in a new pistol and reassembling the pistol after a field strip. The link can wear out and can lead to inaccuracy or failures, even when everything else is in perfect condition. Most pistols now use a "modified Browning system," which means that they get the barrel to do everything just like how Browning wanted it to, but without the link. One way to fix the weakest link in the chain is to remove the chain. Both guns here use Browning's original link system, but they do so using links made to tighter tolerances and of better steel than was available back in the early 1900s. They are still annoying when putting the guns back together, but this is really my only beef with them. Once properly reassembled, one forgets and forgives that pesky linkage.

Both guns sport wide-mouth ejection ports, with the claim that the wider ports make the gun more reliable. I'm not sure if that is exactly true or if that has just become the style in new 1911s. I've fired original 1911 Colts with the smaller ejection ports and they ejected just fine for me. However, the original Colts did bite my hands. What is called "hammer bite" is when some meat of the shooter's hand gets pinched by the hammer. My shooting hand has had a couple holes punched into the flesh because of that. Both guns here use a shorter hammer style that came out with the Commander and are thusly referred to as "Commander style" hammers. They also use a grip safety that is longer and wider than the original Government Model's. These are called "beaver tails" and they not only prevent hammer bites, but they feel good, they guide the hand to the holstered gun's grip, and they look better, in my opinion. Some purists do not like the beaver tails and claim to have never been bitten by an original style government's hammer. They also recall things like serving as crewmen aboard the Minotaur, silent picture shows, and enjoying these new-fangled electric lights. Newer shooters have taken a lot of tips from shooting competitions, such as IPSC, where a very high grip has become vogue and is advantageous in controlling recoil. This high grip will get you hammer-bitten if your hands are even slightly "meaty" like mine are. In my opinion, both guns offer some improvements to the old 1911 platform and are examples that are the top of the line.

The Rock River Pro Carry is a fantastic example of the 1911. It is elegant and refined, and it offers everything that a connoisseur of forty-fives will appreciate. Rock River also builds some of the best AR-15 type rifles on the planet, with superior fit and finish work that will make owners of DPMS and Bushmaster rifles want to go home and kick their dogs. The Pro Carry is a big step up from the 1911 rat race of guns that cost \$1,000 or less. You could easily purchase a second pistol for the price difference. There are differences between guns at this level and guns at or under the \$1,000 mark. At this level, we expect a perfect slide-to-frame fit. The Pro Carry has that. They slide moves back and forth on the rails smoothly, with no tightness and no lateral play. It's bank-vault solid. This is what a 1911's slide should feel like. The barrel should have no play inside its bushing either. Some lesser 1911s have a little bit, but not in any Rock Rivers that I've ever seen. When the barrel and slide lock up as solid as this, you have a



good indication that the gun is going to be accurate. This Pro Carry certainly is. They advertise a guarantee of accuracy of 2.5 inches at 50 yards. Fifty yards is crazy for a service gun...That's a long way out there. Two and a half inches at that range is what most shooters do with a rifle. This is the result of using a match grade Kart barrel and making sure that the gun is built right. I've heard some guys say that a 1911 is not an accurate handgun. Obviously, they have never fired a good one, and they have certainly never fired a Rock River.

Initially, when I first handled this Pro Carry, I thought that the checkering on the front strap was too sharp. I thought that this would have been too abrasive when firing. This wasn't the case at all. The gun was in perfect control at all times, without the checkering causing any irritation or discomfort. The more I shot the Rock River; the more I liked it. Punching one-hole groups (even with cheap ammo) actually became mundane and eventually boring, if you can believe that. The Pro Carry is a damn fine handgun and worthy of its MSRP. You can get it with a 4.25 inch barrel, the 5 inch (as tested), or even with a 6 inch barrel. As excellent as this 5 inch example is, 4.25 inch is ideal for our purposes. For you connoisseurs of 1911s out there, you need to sample one of these. I like it better than a certain Ed Brown I shot recently, that had a similar configuration, and it's less spendy than the Ed Brown custom too. It is also more accurate than the Ed Brown was. I'm not saying this to take down Ed

Brown, not at all. I'm just using his guns as an example of just how good this Rock River is. The Pro Carry is easily one of the best 1911s I've ever fired. Try one, I dare you. You'll never look at another Kimber again. At the gun shop where I work, we've got a large array of 1911s, from Springfield, Kimber, Para Ordnance, and Smith & Wesson. To be honest, not a single one of them holds any interest for me any more. There is a difference in what you get for your money, and once you shoot a Wilson or a Rock River, anything less is just not good enough anymore. It's hard to describe just how or why that is, so I'll just chalk it up to being spoiled.

The Wilson Combat Professional did not print groups quite as tight as the Pro Carry, but that matters little when the X-ring of your target is completely blown out and your shot group is just one rough-edged hole. The bull-barrel configuration goes a long way in helping accuracy. The Professional is every bit as well built as the Pro Carry. You are not going to detect any flaws in any of the tolerances in the fit and finish. The Professional's shorter sight radius is most likely the cause of the slightly wider one-hole shot groups. The trade-off is a gun that is easier to carry. The tighter checkering felt great in the hand. These things added up to a gun that handled with the ease and precision of a Lotus Exige. In other words, it is fantastic. The gun comes out of the leather and up onto the target faster than the Rock River and more precisely. I'm not sure exactly why that is.

The Professional is a remarkable pistol. As much as Wilson's SDS pistol impressed me, the Professional impresses me just as much. Thanks to a more traditional bull barrel, I like the Professional more. The fact that the Professional is lower on the sticker price than the SDS is a nice bonus.

My wife, Deveni, asked me which one I liked better: the Professional or the Pro Carry. This was a hard question. She might as well have asked me a question about mortgage rates in Anchorage... I don't know! This brings me back to the beginning of the article. The first night I got both of these pistols out on the range, I found myself standing at the hood of my Bronco looking at them until it started raining on me. I stayed there in the rain, trying to decide. My answer was that I needed to shoot them more. I came to that same conclusion several times since. My conclusion is still the same today and is the reason for some financial stress. Ammunition prices are going up like gas prices now, thanks to China buying up large quantities of metals and driving prices up. So I guess I'm going to have to force my hand and make a choice. Between these two handguns, I'm going to have to pick the Wilson Combat. The reasons are the Professional's Commander size, which gives it the advantage for concealed carry work. The new Wilson magazines are also an advantage, thanks to an improved follower design that improves the function of any 1911 pistol it's used in. If you can't get a Wilson 1911 pistol, at least make sure you get Wilson magazines for it! The Armor-Tuff finish comes with a nice, long warranty, so you don't have to worry about babying your investment. You can get the Professional with frames in gray like this one, in black, in OD green, or if you like, you can even get a Professional done up all in stainless. (A stainless Professional with ivory grips would be too angelic for me, but it would be a perfect gun for packing on Sundays.) The gray is probably the best looking of all the options. Once you select your color, Wilson has more for you to try to decide on, such as your holsters and mag pouches. Good luck with that.

Rock River Pro Carry: \$1,795.

<http://www.rockriverarms.com>

Wilson Combat Professional: \$ 2,175.

<http://www.wilsoncombat.com>

George Hill is an NRA Certified Pistol and Personal Protection instructor and the writer and publisher of MadOgre.com. Visit his website for more information on Mad Ogre.
<http://www.madogre.com>
Photography by the Author.

Wilson Combat Professional

