

# REAL PRACTICE WITH

(COMPLETE FAKES)



STORY AND PHOTOS BY JAMES TARR A-25200

I must admit that I was pretty ignorant about the current state of airsoft until the 2007 LPR Nationals in Tulsa. There I shot with some guy who said that almost all of his practice was with airsoft guns at home-made targets in his garage. I didn't know at that time how realistic airsoft guns had become, and had no idea how they might be used for practice. I got an education. That guy was Brad Holt, and not only could he shoot, he was really good. He finished sixth at the Nationals in 2008, shooting a Glock that looked only slightly more realistic than his airsoft gun. I started to investigate.

To get good at our game you have to spend a lot of time with a gun in your hand. There is just no way

around that. Repetition is the mother of perfection. Dry firing is the best way to develop that muscle memory as you can do it nearly anywhere or anytime. I've been interviewing a lot of pro shooters lately for magazine articles. I interviewed Max Michel recently, and as he put it, "All those techniques that got the top shooters to where they are, they didn't do it on the range all day every day, they did it in their basement, their backyard, their bedrooms."

Matt Burkett said, "Almost everything you can do with a gun you can do while dry-firing. The only thing you can't do is recoil control. That's it."

The only problem with dry firing is it can get boring. Reallllly boring. If the thought of dry firing yet again

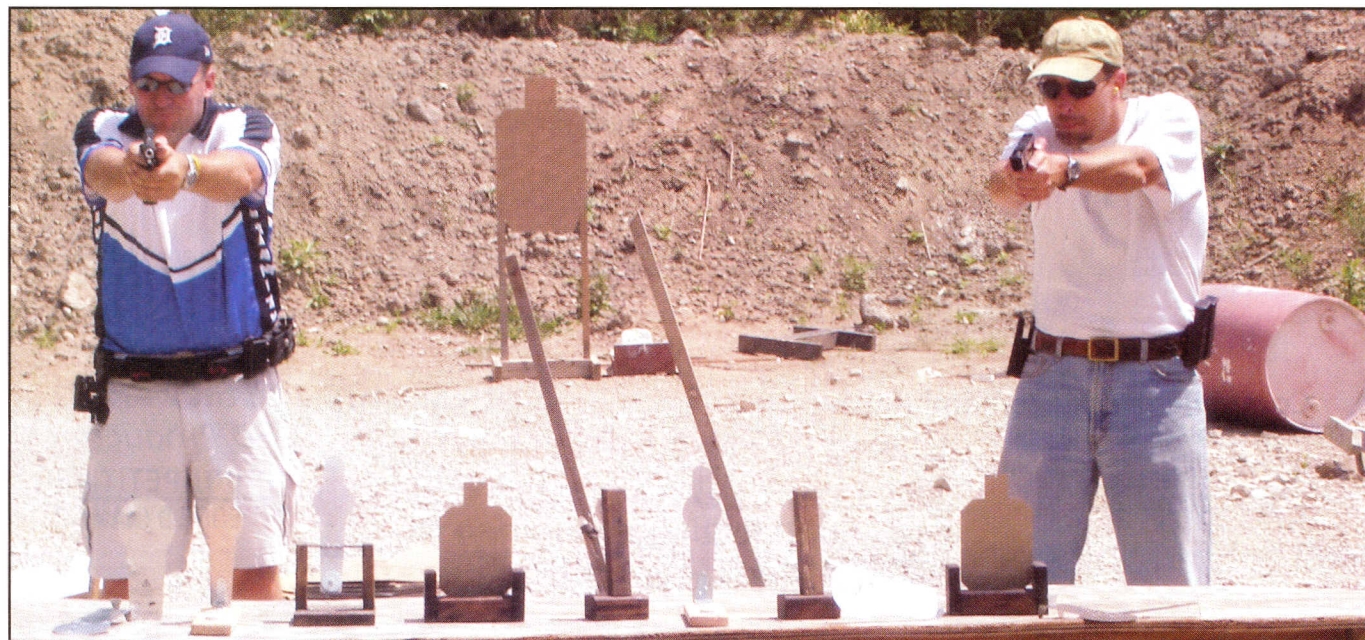
Which is the "real" gun? Turn the page.

makes you grind your teeth, you're either not going to do it, or you're going to cut the session short. Airsoft is the perfect solution.

Current quality airsoft pistols are so close in appearance, and sometimes in feel, to the real thing that they can fool someone who's not familiar with firearms. I think that if the airsoft companies began aggressively marketing their products to police departments, Simunition would soon go out of business (Simunitions are primer-fired paintballs fired out of lightly-modified actual weapons, not for sale to the general public. They are very expensive, and they hurt. A lot.)

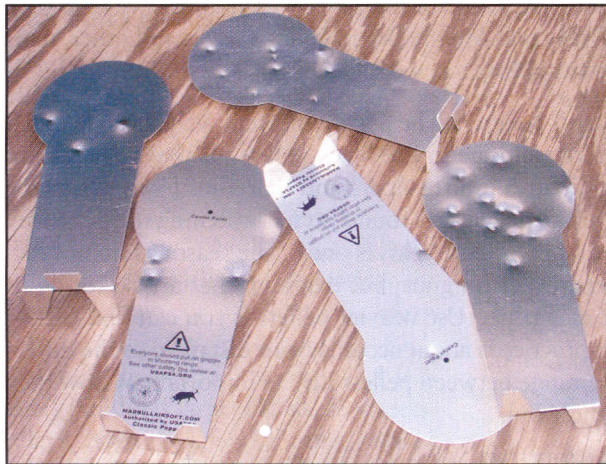
With airsoft, as long as everybody is wearing eye protection, the worst

**Roy Neal and James Tarr mow down the latest made-for-airsoft-training targets. Mad Bull Airsoft's electronic timer is designed to pick up the quiet sounds of airsoft guns, and the targets are by Brad Holt of bradsairsofttargets.com**



that's going to happen is somebody goes home with a welt. Put up a sheet of plastic with a rolled edge on the bottom for a backstop, and all you need for cleanup is a dustpan and broom.

Picture any kind of gun that is used for USPSA, IDPA, or IPSC competition (including Open Division), and there's an airsoft model of it. The airsoft "Glock" 34 pictured here was realistic enough to fool one of my friends, until he pulled the magazine out and saw the airsoft pellets. The airsoft race guns look just as authentic in person as they



While a plastic airsoft pellet won't kill you, anything powerful enough to put dents like these in aluminum targets needs to be respected. ALWAYS wear eye protection when practicing.

do in the pictures, and they fit in the same holsters.

The question to ask when considering the purchase of an airsoft gun is "gas or electric?" When it comes to pistols, you want ones that are powered by green gas. "Green gas" is propane with silicone oil added for lubrication and to lower flammability. The gas launches the pellet and cycles the slide for every shot. The gas reservoir is in the magazine, which also holds the pellets. The reservoirs are refilled through a port on the bottom of the magazine, concealed by the basepad. While the magazines are constructed of steel, they do have plastic parts, and I wouldn't recommend dropping them on the ground while practicing mag changes. The airsoft mags cost as much

as the real thing.

How many rounds a mag will hold and how many magazines you can cycle through the gun before the gas reservoir needs refilling depends on the model, manufacturer, and to some degree the individual piece. Most pistol magazines hold about 25 pellets and they generally get between

100-200 shots out of the reservoir.

Refill time is seconds.

Airsoft pistols can be had with either plastic or aluminum slides. The G34 pictured has an aluminum slide, and with the mag in place it weighs 26 ounces, which is two ounces more than my



This airsoft Limcat Open gun weighs 40 ounces with a magazine inserted. Custom throughout, it's available from Tactical Airsoft Products of Virginia.

real Glock when it's unloaded. The balance is different--most of the airsoft gun's weight is in the metal magazine, whereas in a real Glock most of the weight is in the slide. As for the trigger, it's similar to a standard Glock trigger in length and feel, only lighter (about 4 pounds). The airsoft race guns shown here were provided by Tactical Airsoft Products of Virginia

**AGES 4-21**

# JUNIOR SHOOTERS

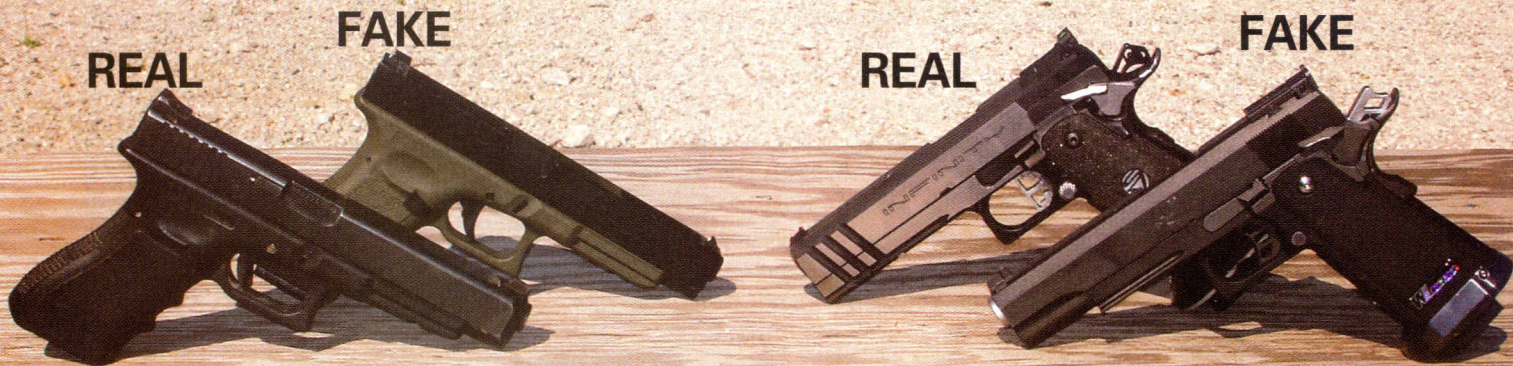
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and run between \$550 and \$650. While this may seem like a lot of money, genuine C-More optic sights don't get cheaper just because you bolted it on an Airsoft gun - and would you really want to practice with something less? These pistols are cheaper to buy and shoot than real race guns — by an order of magnitude! The three airsoft Open guns I was able to examine weighed between 27 and 31 ounces without the magazines, and the magazines add another 13 ounces. One has a plastic slide, the other two have slides made of aluminum. Their triggers were worse than that of the airsoft G34, which wasn't what I was expecting, and is not typical, as the Western Arms airsoft SV Limited gun clone pictured had an excellent trigger.

While airsoft guns can be really cool toys, what we're talking about here is quality practice. To that end, numerous companies make miniaturized targets specifically designed for the tactical airsoft market. Yes, I said tactical airsoft. Falling Pepper poppers, falling and swinging plates, bowling pins, and perfectly proportioned IDPA/IPSC targets are all available. My airsoft Glock 34, made by PHX Tactical, can do 2-inch groups at 5 yards which, on the reduced targets, gives me the same sight picture I'd have shooting at full-sized targets at 15 yards and beyond.

Most of the scaled-down IPSC targets/plates/poppers in these photos were made by Brad Holt. He sells them through his website, bradsairsofttargets.com. He also markets a plate rack and a set of poppers which overlap when

they fall—and let me tell you, airsoft shootoffs are just as fun as the real thing. Mad Bull Airsoft (madbullairsoft.com) sells a number of items including a timer that is sensitive enough to pick up the sound of the gas powered-guns. I've seen both Tom Drazy and Manny Bragg selling targets and other items for airsoft practice as well.

Airsoft pellets can be had in different weights and colors. Brad Holt told me to use black pellets, as they're harder to see in flight. I didn't understand that until I was practicing using white pellets and found myself watching the pellets fly instead of my sights. This is one of the reasons I do not recommend lasers on guns, but that's another article for a different magazine. Use heavier pellets if you can find them—airsoft practice is about accuracy, not distance, so the difference in range between pellets isn't as important as how they buck the wind.

No matter what I might say, there are those of you who will insist that airsoft doesn't have any place in serious training. Don't take my word for it.

"Airsoft is great (for practice) too," Rob Leatham told me in a recent interview. "I used to think it was a joke. Now I have a whole bunch of 'em. Airsoft guns are so good now that some of them will shoot an inch group at 10 yards. As far as learning the basic fundamentals of gun manipulation, it's great."

"Two things I would do if I was coming up," Taran Butler told me, "especially considering how ammo has doubled in cost in the last two years, is airsoft and .22s. Airsoft—they have so many guns that are exactly like the real thing. Airsoft is 85 percent of what we do, aiming, transitioning between targets, that kind of thing."

Taran Butler has experience training police officers, military, and Hollywood celebrities. His 20-acre range in Simi Valley used to feature a paintball facility, but no longer.

"Only the kids wanted to use it," Taran explained, and the visiting celebrities there to train for movie roles could hardly walk across it without getting paint from

**The targets are tiny, making them challenging even at close distances. Airsoft can't simulate distance well, but drawing to a 3-inch plate under time pressure takes precession.**





PHOTO BY RICK LOWE, COURTESY OF JERICO AIRSOFT

**A shooter provides covering fire with his scoped M21. Yes, that's an airsoft gun.**


exploded paintballs on the cuffs of their chinos.

Butler's paintball facility is no more, and has been replaced by Jericho, advertised as a "Private Airsoft MOUT Facility." MOUT is a military acronym for Military Operations in Urban Terrain, or more simply, urban combat. Jericho, operated by Rick Lowe, is an outdoor facility and features buildings large and small, streets, alleys, courtyards, and enough piles of old tires, fake garbage, and sewer pipe to give anybody who has been to Iraq flashbacks. And, best of all, instead of the mess of paintballs, "For cleanup all you need is a broom," Butler says. Simi Valley SWAT trains at the facility, as have groups of officers from other departments and certain units from Fort Benning, which indicates just how useful the people in harm's way are finding airsoft as a training tool.

Airsoft rifles are so good that they're almost indistinguishable from the real thing until you pick one up, and

then barely. Finding a version that looks just like your 3-gun rifle won't be tough. For rifles, get the "electric" models, which are powered by battery packs usually hidden in the stocks.

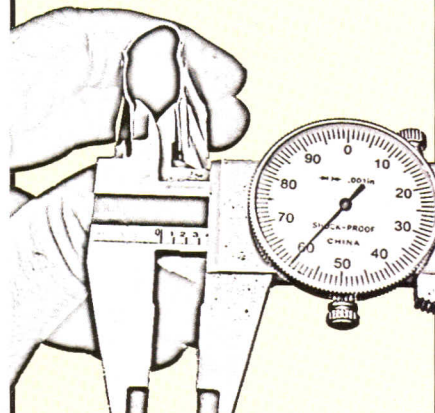
The competitive world is ahead of the mainstream "gun culture" when it comes to realiz-

ing the utility of airsoft guns and gear for training, but what's new about that? We're always on the cutting edge, whether it comes to tools or techniques. If it wasn't for practical shooting, nobody in Afghanistan would know what an Aimpoint is, much less an EOTech, and police officers would still be shooting one-handed from the "combat crouch." In 10 years the tactical police magazines will be touting the value of airsoft guns as training tools, and once again we, as practical shooters, will be able to say, "You're welcome." 



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# IWA 2009: A Practical Shooter's View of the 'European SHOT Show'



By HANNÈRE VERMEULEN AND SASJA BARENTSEN

The IWA & Outdoor Classics is Europe's largest trade show for hunting and sport shooting. Sadly, this 36th edition of the IWA was overshadowed by a tragic

school shooting in the German town of Winnenden, a mere 125 miles from Nuremberg, just two days before the start of the exhibition.

**Practical Shooters had a lot to see at Europe's premier arms convention. That's Martin Kamenicek demonstrating a CZ Tactical Sport in 9mm Major.**

As Jürgen Triebel, president of the German association of rifle manufacturers (VDB), and Olaf Sauer, president of the German association of sports and hunting weapons manufacturers (JSM), put it in their opening speech: "Whatever we do in regards to this tragedy, it will be wrong. If we let the exhibition go on, we'll be accused of being cold and commercial. If we'd cancel the show, we'd be admitting guilt." They asked for a few moments of silence to express grief about what had happened.

German state secretary at the federal Ministry of the Interior, Dr August Hanning, who was also a speaker at the official opening, emphasized that Germany has some of the strictest gun laws in Europe and the government should not take hasty steps making even stricter legislation until it becomes clear exactly what happened.

In most European countries, firearms are only allowed for sports and hunting. Each country has its own

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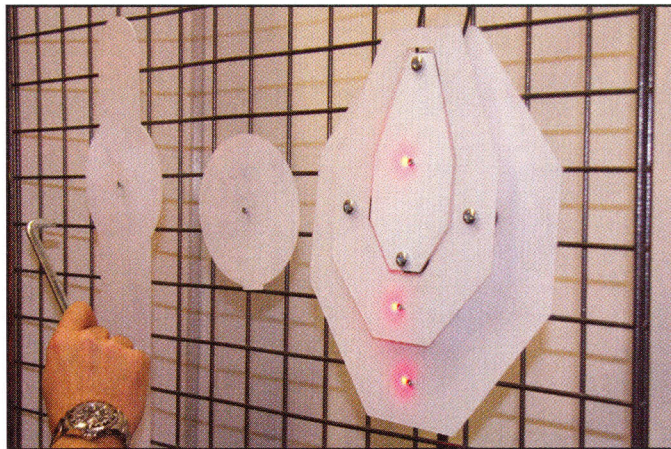
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Left: Production World Champion Adam Tyc signs a poster for one of his youngest fans. Below: self-scoring AIPSC target, anyone? Tap on the target and the Technical Technology target's LEDs show the hits.



gun laws, which can differ a lot from their neighbors'. In the UK, for example, handguns aren't allowed, but shotguns are. In the Netherlands handguns are legal, but most shotguns are not. In Italy 9x19 ammunition is forbidden (but 9x21 and 9x23 are ok) while Danish shooters won't get a license for a .40 caliber handgun. The exhibitors at IWA are catering to quite a diverse crowd.

That diverse crowd was well served by the vast range of products on display: airsoft guns, handguns, rifle scopes, beautifully engraved shotguns, dog tracking systems for hunters, bird call whistles, target guns, shooting jackets, biathlon rifles, walnut wood for rifle stocks, clay target

launching installations, a reloading machine for shotgun ammo, paper targets, backstops, tasers and a whole lot of knives.

### AIPSC

In most European countries airsoft guns can be bought without a permit. In the Netherlands, where we're from, they are illegal. Even for sports shooters with a firearms per-

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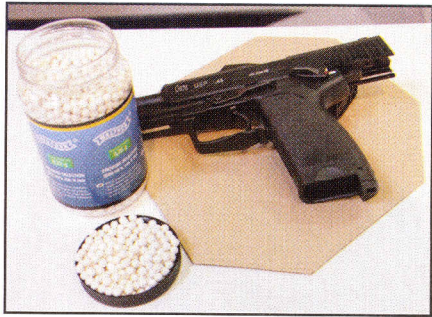
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Airsoft IPSC is rising fast in Europe. Scaled-down IPSC targets, full-size IPSC trainers, airsoft swingers (below) you name it, if you wanted it to play airsoft IPSC, it was here.



mit. This much to our disappointment, as there are some airsoft replicas that would make great IPSC training guns. About 80 percent of the weight of the 'real thing,' cheap, low noise, and lead-free. But alas, not an option.

After some debate IPSC has recently embraced Airsoft IPSC, which is mostly shot in Asian countries where the possession of firearms is difficult or not allowed and also in the UK where handguns have been banned since 1997. In Germany AIPSC was picked up for a different reason. As Jürgen Tegge, official from the German shooting sports association (BDS) and IROA vice president explains: "It's a great way to get younger people started with IPSC. It's low cost and can be shot by people who don't have a lot of money, especially youngsters." For the same

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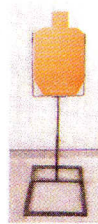
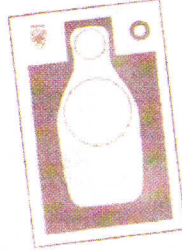
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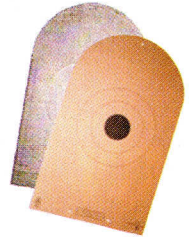
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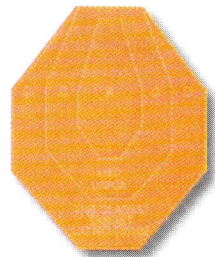
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Familiar faces part II: Seeing Jerry Miculek's face on an English-language advertisement might seem surprising for a show in Germany, but English is common here.

reason Germany recently started with IPSC small caliber (using .22 rimfires). So far, this division is unique to Germany.

The German company Umarex, owner of brands like Walther and Hämmerli, is jumping on the bandwagon. At their stand they were proudly showing the Walther P22 and

SP22, complete with holster and belt. At the Umarex stand we talked to Florian Breidenbach, a German junior IPSC shooter who is normally known for using Hodgdon 'Loudshot' in his Open gun. He now also shoots small caliber and Airsoft IPSC. "I'm a student" Breidenbach explained, "so I don't have a lot of money. I train a lot with an airsoft version of my Open gun, because it's much cheaper. I can shoot 3000 plastic balls for a mere 10 euros. By now we have about 50 people who shoot AIPSC in Germany, younger as well as older ones."

A wide range of airsoft



Martin Kamenicek and Adam Tyc doing a demo for CZ.

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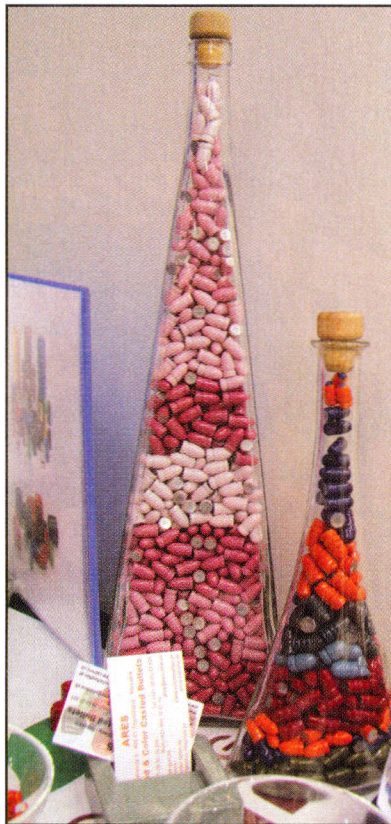
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**From candy-colored bullets to an organization for Airsoft and .22-caliber IPSC, IWA 2009 was full of surprises.**

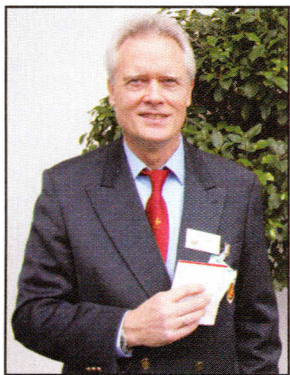


guns and accessories was offered at the IWA. Several exhibitors were selling small cardboard AIPSC targets. The Italian firm Technical Technology even demonstrated a system of self-scoring targets.

### Familiar Faces

Of course there were several IPSC shooters promoting their sponsors' brands. Four-time Open world champion Eric Grauffel was there for Tanfoglio. At the CZ stand, two-time World Production champion Adam Tyc and top Open shooter Martin Kamenicek demonstrated their reloading skills and presented CZ's new P07 DUTY. The P07, more a carry weapon than an IPSC gun, comes with both a safety and a de-cocking lever that are easily interchangeable.

The STI Euro team, consisting of seven shooters of six different nationalities, were present as well. Italian team members Irene Canetta and Fabrizio Pesche brought along



**IROA VP and BDS official Jürgen Tegge.**

their two large dogs who, for the occasion, were also clad in STI colors. Team captain Saul Kirsch from Double Alpha Academy showed his newest products: Production division holsters, colored basepads with custom engraving, a sideways mount for the Aimpoint Micro that places the dot lower to the slide, and foldable wings for table pickups. When you don't need them, simply fold them back and they won't be in the way when storing

your gun or putting a dust cover over your holster. Double Alpha now has its own CNC machine, which means we can expect even more interesting products from them in the future.

### Cool stuff

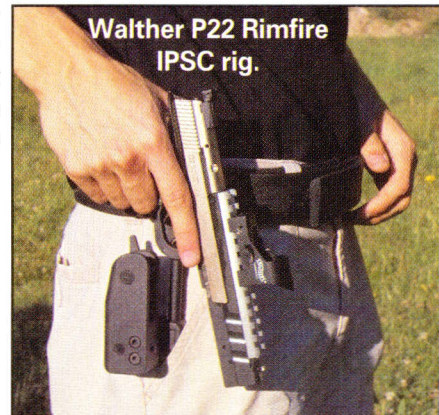
Swiss gun manufacturer Sphinx showed their CZ-style handguns, made out of steel and/or aluminum. Even the aluminum ones are not light weight, but the guns that are completely made out of steel are so heavy they make recoil control easy as pie. Sphinx has developed a new grip that fits STI-style magazines instead of their traditional CZ-style ones. At the show, the STI mag was only available for the Modified guns, but due to the modular system of their guns, one can put this grip under a Sphinx handgun of any IPSC division.

Very candy-like were the color-coated bullets from Slovakian manufacturer Ares. They come in many different colors (yes, even in pink, ladies!) and almost look too nice to shoot. Ares can coat the back as well as the front, which reduces lead exhaust when shooting, a real advantage for those of us who shoot at indoor ranges. By the way, the Ares bullets were not the only pink stuff to be seen at the IWA. S&W showed their 'pink ribbon' pink-gripped M&P9, there were mean looking diving knives with bright pink handles, and we even spotted a pair of pink handcuffs. No self respecting thug would want to be seen cuffed in those!

About 32,000 visitors with more than 100 nationalities came to this years IWA & Outdoor Classics, where 1,132 exhibitors from 53 different countries presented their products. In spite of the world-wide economic recession, there were slightly more visitors as well as exhibitors than last year. Let's hope this trend will continue in the future.

### To Learn More::

[www.iwa.info](http://www.iwa.info)



### About the Author:

Hanneke Vermeulen and Sasja Barentsen live in Amsterdam. Together, they produce the Dutch IPSC Publication, the "Bullet-In." Hanneke does the editing, Sasja the layout. Both compete in Standard Division at matches primarily in the Netherlands and Germany.

