

ROHRBAUGH R-9 POCKET PISTOL WITH POWER

DUANE A. DAIKER



Rohrbaugh R-9 Specifications

Length	5.2 in.
Height	3.7 in.
Width	0.812 in.
Sight Radius	4.25 in.
Barrel Length	2.9 in.
Magazine Capacity	6 + 1
Weight (w/ Empty Mag.)	14.3 oz.
Weight (w/ Full Mag.)	17 oz.
Trigger Pull	7.0 lbs.
Caliber	9mm

Pocket pistols are always a compromise. Everyone who carries a concealed firearm would like to have the firepower of a full-sized service pistol. Unfortunately, neither a Glock 17, or a Beretta 92FS, or a Colt 1911A1 will fit in your pocket. Even sub-compact guns usually require some type of belt carry and a cover garment. If you really want a pocket pistol, you have to be pre-pared to compromise on capacity, or caliber, or both.

Until now, true pocket-sized pistols were chambered for .380 ACP or smaller—with .380 ACP generally considered to be the smallest round adequate for serious self-defense. The Rohrbaugh R-9 breaks new ground for pocket guns, putting the well-established 9mm cartridge into a very small package that will easily drop into the average pocket.

R-9 Specs and Function

The R-9 is definitely a pocket-sized pistol. It measures a mere 5.2 inches long and 3.7 inches tall, with a slide width of just more than .8 inches. These measurements make it smaller in all dimensions than a Kahr PM-9, and very close in size to a Kel-Tec P-

3AT. The R-9 weighs in between the two, at a very reasonable 14.3 ounces unloaded, with magazine.

Unlike many of the guns in its class, the R-9 is all metal construction. The slide and barrel are stainless steel, with the frame made of aircraft aluminum. The grip panels are constructed of carbon fiber—for high strength and low weight. Interestingly, none of the metal parts are made from castings or metal injection molding (MIM)—cost saving measures used by many firearm manufacturers today. The result is a gun that is made of the highest quality materials.

The gun operates on a simple locked breech mechanism with a double action only (DAO) trigger configuration. The use of a DAO mechanism permits a design with no external safety—because none is needed. It also allows for repeat strike capability. Each pull of the trigger completely cocks and releases the flush fitting hammer. Rohrbaugh specified this design for the ultimate in simplicity—a “point and shoot” pocket gun.

The magazine release is located on the heel of the gun, as seen on many European designs. There is no magazine release button – you must push back the heel release to drop the

magazine. Although this feature is not what many American shooters expect, the heel release was chosen to further simplify the design and prevent accidental release of the magazine in the pocket.

The R-9 has no slide release lever either. In fact, it has no slide stop. The slide will not lock open on an empty magazine. The omission of a slide stop, as a concession to overall gun thickness and operational simplicity, has become commonplace on pocket guns of late. In truth, these guns are not designed for speed reloads, and the extra step of working the slide to chamber a round from a fresh magazine is not such a big deal.

Each gun ships with two high-quality stainless steel magazines. There is only one size—a flush-fit magazine holding six rounds. The mags have five witness holes, allowing for an easy visual verification of the number of rounds available. There are no after-market magazines available yet, but spares are readily available from Rohrbaugh.

The gun comes in two basic configurations. The R-9s (shown in the pictures accompanying this article) has a set of minimal fixed sights milled into the top of the slide. Although small, the sights are quite decent—reminding me of the fixed sights on a Smith & Wesson J-frame revolver. The sights are stainless steel, in their natural color, and have no dots or outlines. Nonetheless, they are very serviceable. The R-9 (no “s”) model is identical to the R-9s, but has a smooth slide with no sights at all. Although sights are not strictly necessary on a pocket pistol, I find the sights on the R-9s to be very useful and not prone to snagging. For what its worth—I think the sighted model is the way to go. *Continued on page 26*



The R-9 disassembled to its basic components for cleaning.

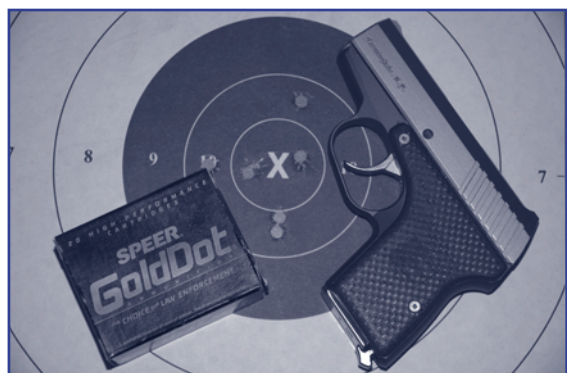


The R-9 ships in a lockable hard case, with a cable lock, two mags and an extra recoil spring.

Rohrbaugh originally offered the R-9 in two frame colors – silver and gray. After experiencing some problems with the anodization process for silver, that color was dropped, and all the current frames are gray. The gray frames create a nice contrast with the stainless slide, and work well with the bluish carbon fiber grips—which are also standard across the line.

The entire gun is “melted,” with no sharp surfaces, for ease of carry. The workmanship on this gun is obvious. All of the parts fit extremely well, and the operation of the slide is slick and smooth. Everything about the fit and finish of this gun indicates quality construction.

My one criticism of the design is that breakdown of the gun could be easier. To disassemble the pistol, you must hold the slide back and align a hole in the slide with the barrel pin. The pin must then be pushed out using a 1/16 inch brass punch. This operation requires three hands to do efficiently. It would be nice if the disassembly could be done without a special tool (or extra hand), but once I had done it a few times, it got easier. Cleaning is very straightforward once the gun is apart, and reassembly is just reversing the process and tapping the pin back in.



Speer Gold Dot 124g JHPs produced this group shooting free hand at 21 feet.

It should be noted that the gun comes equipped with a spare recoil spring, and the manual notes that the spring should be replaced every 500 rounds. Although the springs are top quality Wolff springs, they take a beating in a gun this small and powerful. Of course, the R-9 is not a range gun, and many people will never wear out the two springs that come with the gun.

Shooting the R-9

The R-9 is designed to be as small and light as the laws of physics will permit, and still safely contain the pressures generated by standard 9mm ammunition. In fact, through trial and error, and close cooperation with Wolff Gunsprings, the R-9 was designed with the shortest slide length and spring length that would still permit reliable operation. As such, this gun is a handful to shoot. Rohrbaugh can't change the laws of physics, and a 12 oz. handgun with a two finger grip will jump and twist when you shoot it. That being said, the smooth lines and the grip design do help considerably. Rohrbaugh consulted with an orthopedic surgeon on its grip angle and contours when designing the gun. There are no sharp edges or sharp checkering to flail your skin. All in all, the recoil of the gun is not painful – but you won't forget you are shooting it either. Recoil is very subjective, but I would rate it as similar to shooting .38 Special +P rounds in an AirLite revolver, and not nearly as unpleasant as shooting .357 Magnums from such a gun. The sharp recoil, however, is one reason this is not a great gun for beginners. After just a bit of familiarization, I had no problem shooting the gun rapidly or controlling it during rapid fire.

The gun grips well, although only two fingers will fit – as is common on sub-compact and smaller guns. There is no risk of accidentally depressing the magazine release, because of the heel-type release design. The deep contour of the backstrap acts as a “beavertail” of sorts, keeping the hand well below the axis of movement for the slide. There is no danger of hammer bite or slide bite with this gun.

The trigger is smooth and polished. The trigger pull is long, but smooth, with some stacking at the end of the pull. The trigger

breaks at a very reasonable 7 pounds. The reset is very smooth and almost impossible to feel. Since the trigger pull is the principal safety device on this DAO gun, the longish trigger pull is very appropriate. It would be quite difficult to fully depress this trigger without a conscious act, yet it is certainly manageable for controlled fire.

Target accuracy is not required for a pistol of this type, and a reasonable range for defensive use of a pocket gun probably does not exceed about 25 feet. Nonetheless, a defensive weapon needs to have a certain level of combat accuracy. At a realistic combat distance of 21 feet, I could place 6 shots into the 10-ring of a standard NRA pistol target, shooting without support—as shown in one of the pictures accompanying this article. Given these results, the mechanical accuracy of the pistol and the effectiveness of the sights are clearly adequate for this gun's intended purpose.



This entire carry package (including a SureFire E1e, Kershaw Random Leek, and leather from K&D Holsters) weighs in at a scant 28 oz.!

To simulate a combat situation, I also tried many strings of rapid fire—as fast as I could pull the trigger without taking time to reacquire the front sights—at a distance of 10 feet. This tested the ability to control the gun and reacquire the target instinctively under recoil. A typical result had all six rounds in the torso of a standard silhouette target. By slowing down a bit, and at least seeing the front sight on the target each time, the results were significantly better. I also moved a standard silhouette out to 75 feet, and confirmed that I could hit a man-sized target at 75 feet with deliberate aiming and good trigger discipline.

My testing involved approximately 250 rounds of mixed jacketed hollow point and full metal jacketed rounds. I did not experience any failures of any kind. When it comes to a premium defensive ammo, R-9 owners tend to agree that Speer Gold Dots, whether of the 115 grain or 124 grain

variety, seem to perform the best. The R-9 is not a “one round wonder” and was not designed for any particular round, but is reported to have some ammo sensitivity. As with any gun, you must establish reliability with your chosen carry round. Again, I would suggest the Gold Dots, which have proven very reliable. However, the gun is not rated for +P use, so stick with standard pressure choices.

Carrying the R-9

The R-9 was designed to be a pocket pistol, and most people will carry it in a pocket. When carried in a proper pocket holster (i.e., one that covers the trigger, supports and distributes the weight, and disguises the shape), this gun will disappear for most people. Although the R-9 is new to the market, there are already many holster companies offering custom fit leather and kydex holsters. The K&D Holsters Pocket Defender shown in this article is typical of the leather styles available. Other quality makers like R.J. Hedley, Ron Graham and Milt Sparks have similar offerings. For those who are content with a more generic fit, there are any number of pocket gun sized holsters available from Uncle Mikes, DeSantis and others.

The R-9 is also a natural for other deep concealment carry methods—such as ankle holsters, belly bands, or below the waistband type holsters. The small size and light weight opens up any number of carry methods that won't work for even sub-compact sized guns. For those who prefer inside the waistband carry, the R-9 will certainly do that as well, although I would recommend a holster that sits deeply below the belt or has some type of retention since there is actually very little barrel length below the level of the grip to hold the gun in place.

Conclusions

The Rohrbaugh R-9 is a fine example of a high quality pocket pistol. The most criticism of the gun seems to concern its price. The suggested retail is \$950. Obviously, this is higher than similar guns, although it is hard to define exactly which guns compete with the R-9. It seems that the relatively high price is based on a few factors. First, the gun utilizes all top quality and expensive materials, like aluminum alloys, carbon fiber, and Wolff springs. But, it also encompasses a lot of research and development, and is made in a relatively low volume factory with significant hand fitting and finishing. All of this results in a higher dealer price. Unfortunately, the hype around this gun and the relatively short supply also cause some dealers to price gouge...or at least not discount these guns. If the suggested retail gives you heartburn but this gun might fit your needs, take heart—I have already seen this gun offered below suggested retail, and the prices will stabilize further over time. If you can't justify spending that much on a pocket gun, or if other cheaper guns meet your needs, then the R-9 might not be for you.

Furthermore, the Rohrbaugh R-9 is not an ideal pistol for the beginning shooter. This design pushes the limits of a pocket pistol, and embodies many of the compromises common to this particular class of firearm. Pocket pistols as a whole are not easy to shoot, and require practice and training.

However, with those limitations in mind, the R-9 may be the best pocket pistol on the market today, and is certainly the smallest 9mm pocket pistol available. This gun will not disappoint you with its size, function or quality of construction. If you are ready to step up to a high quality and truly pocket-sized pistol in 9mm, I highly recommend the Rohrbaugh R-9.



The very modest Rohrbaugh Firearms factory in Farmingdale, New York.

About Rohrbaugh Firearms

After 20 years as a firearms instructor, Karl Rohrbaugh understood the need for a small and powerful defensive handgun. His first step toward the realization of this product was a drawing on a napkin in 1995. His first concept was for a .380 ACP pocket pistol incorporating a magnetic “safe gun” technology. The idea evolved over time, and the introduction of Seecamp's diminutive .380 ACP model pushed Karl to up the stakes for his gun—he began to dream of a pocket-sized gun in 9mm.

The first prototype was shown at the 2002 SHOT show, causing throngs of people to swarm the small Rohrbaugh Firearms booth for the duration of the show. Spurred on by the intense interest, Karl and his family redoubled their efforts to complete the design and begin production of this ground-breaking firearm. After nearly nine years of effort, long hours, and a huge financial investment, the Rohrbaugh R-9 pistols began rolling off the production line on May 4, 2004.

The Rohrbaugh Firearms factory in Farmingdale, New York is a small privately owned operation. The assembly of all Rohrbaugh pistols is handled personally by Karl Rohrbaugh and his long time friend and master gunsmith Steve Reuter. All R-9 pistols are test fired by Karl, or his brother Eric, before being cleaned, inspected, boxed, and shipped out.

Rohrbaugh Firearms and its R-9 pistols have attracted world-wide interest for their size and quality. However, the story of Karl Rohrbaugh and his tireless pursuit of the American Dream is nearly as interesting as the product itself.

Internet Sources:

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Duane A. Daiker is the founder of the Rohrbaugh Forum: www.RohrbaughForum.com. Duane shoots regularly in club IPSC matches and enjoys writing and researching on concealed carry issues. Contact Duane at Duane@Daiker.net.
Photography by Teresa Daiker.

