

Breaking in the semiautomatic pistol



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Selecting a semiautomatic pistol for personal defense involves more than just finding a firearm that “fits well in the hand” or “shoots nice.” It has to be reliable and function flawlessly.

Part of building confidence in a pistol’s reliability is to run it through the paces known as break-in. Most manufacturers suggest that break-in occurs within the first 350 to 500 rounds for semiautomatic pistols.

This article addresses the recommended procedures for breaking in a new pistol and explains how to evaluate the pistol to ensure that it is functioning properly during the break-in testing process.

Start by thoroughly cleaning the slide, barrel and frame and removing all packing grease and storage lubricants. Properly lubricate all designated lubrication points as noted in the owner’s manual.

When evaluating a new pistol, you want to see how it will perform when it is hot, dirty and dry, so during break-in, don’t clean the pistol or add any lubricant once you start the live-fire sequence.

I prefer to run all break-in rounds in one range session, with the only breaks in live fire being to reload magazines and hang new targets. Use the magazines you intend to

carry and number them accordingly to help identify any magazines that consistently fail to function properly or cause malfunctions.

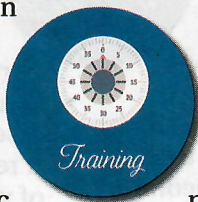
All shots are fired at seven yards on paper targets. I use two targets: an 8-inch-by-14-inch center-mass target, at which all rounds fired must be consistently grouped, and a 2-inch circle target to evaluate precision accuracy.

My standard round count for break-in on a new pistol is 350 rounds total — 300 rounds of FMJ training ammunition and 50 rounds of personal-defense JHP ammunition.

My ratio of target transition is as follows: Fire 45 rounds, with two hands, on the 8-by-14 target, then slow fire a five-round string (two hands) on the 2-inch circle. Fire 45 rounds, right hand only, on the 8-by-14 target, then slow fire a five-round string (two hands) on the 2-inch circle. Fire 45 rounds, left hand only, on the 8-by-14 target, then slow fire a five-round string (two hands) on the 2-inch circle.

Do this sequence twice, using the 300 rounds of training ammunition.

Using the 50 rounds of personal-defense ammunition, fire 45 rounds with two hands on the 8-by-14 target, then slow fire a five-round string (two hands) on the 2-inch circle.



Run all the live-fire drills from ready pistol and shoot short strings of two to five shots per presentation. If you are using a DA/SA (double-action/single-action) pistol, the first shot of each string should be from double-action.

If you intend to carry your pistol with a dedicated weapon-mounted flashlight attached, run the first 150 rounds of FMJ without the flashlight attached, and run the second 150 rounds of FMJ and all 50 rounds of personal-defense ammunition with the flashlight attached.

During the evaluation, magazines should seat and lock into the magazine well properly. Magazines that fail to lock into the magazine well properly should be removed from personal-defense service.

After the last round in a magazine is fired, the follower should push the slide catch into its locking position on the slide, properly locking the slide to the rear. Faulty or broken followers that fail to accomplish this task should be replaced and the magazines retested for proper functionality.

When an empty magazine locks the slide to the rear, press the magazine release button, and the magazine should fall freely from the magazine well unassisted. Magazines that hang up or bind in the magazine well should be cleaned, inspected and retested. If binding persists and the magazine does not fall freely from the magazine well, that magazine should be removed from personal-defense service.

When shooting the pistol with two hands, especially if you are using the thumbs-forward grip, hand placement of the support hand on the frame should be evaluated

to ensure that it does not come into involuntary contact with the slide catch lever, decocking lever or magazine release button on either side of the pistol (for those that have ambidextrous features).

I find that most shooter-induced grip-related malfunctions occur when competition-style extended slide catch levers and extended magazine release buttons are used. Keep competition-type components off serious pistols that are being used for personal defense! Use factory stock slide catch levers and magazine release buttons to minimize these problems from occurring.

I emphasize the importance of testing one-hand shooting drills during the break-in sequence with both the right hand and left hand to ensure that stovepipes are not occurring due to improper grip.

Learning how your handgun performs during the break-in testing process is what is going to establish reliability and build confidence in a tool that may one day be needed to save a life.

As always, stay safe and remain vigilant. ♥

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