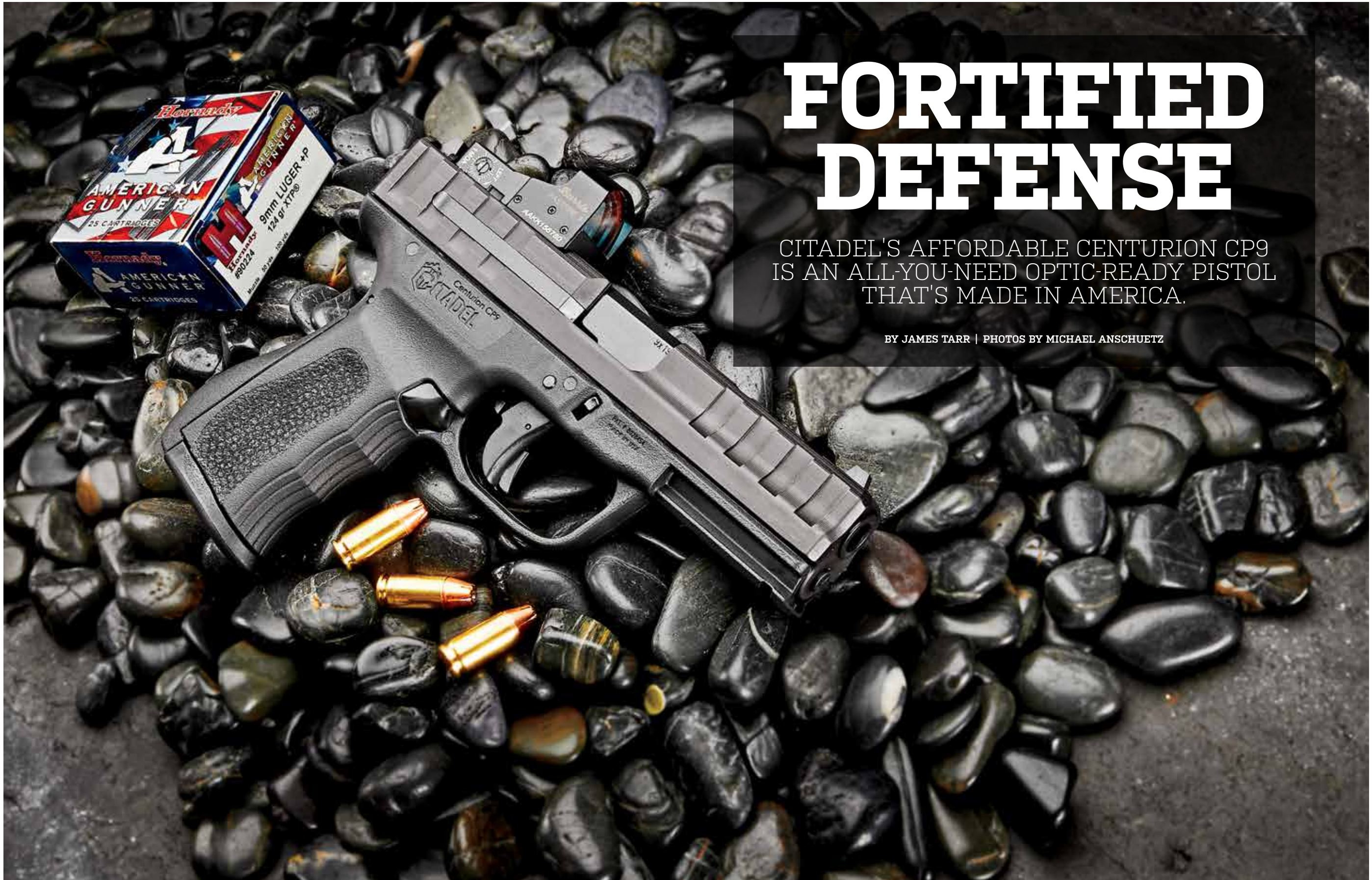


FORTIFIED DEFENSE

CITADEL'S AFFORDABLE CENTURION CP9 IS AN ALL-YOU-NEED OPTIC-READY PISTOL THAT'S MADE IN AMERICA.

BY JAMES TARR | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ





The Citadel Centurion CP9 presents the familiar profile of a striker-fired pistol, but the details distinguish this high-value striker. Guns & Ammo evaluated the optic-ready feature using a Burris FastFire 3. [\\$276](#)



CITADEL is one of Legacy Sports International's brands (legacysports.com), which include Howa, Nikko Sterling, Pointer and Puma. Under the Citadel name, it imports shotguns, rifles, and pistols, but prior to the Centurion CP9, all of the centerfire pistols were made by Armscor of the Philippines. The Centurion CP9, as tested, is Citadel's first pistol made entirely in the United States.

For some time, pistols meant for concealed carry have been the best-sellers in America. The CP9 is squarely aimed at that market. This is a mid-size, budget-priced, striker-fired 9mm pistol meant to give consumers everything they need (and nothing they don't) in a carry gun.

The CP9 has a 4-inch barrel. Overall, it is 6¾-inches long, 5-inches tall, and 1.1-inches wide everywhere but at the slide stop. With an empty magazine, it weighs 23.8 ounces. In short, the CP9 was sized perfectly for that Goldilocks-zone carry gun, a pistol big enough to shoot accurately, with double-digit capacity, yet small enough for many to conceal.

The CP9 ships with one, flush, 14-round magazine. Ten-round magazines are also available, though, if you need to live in one of those states, and Citadel plans to offer extended 17-round magazines as well.

The all-black version is the base model, having an MSRP of \$399. I saw it listed online for less than \$350. Citadel does have several patriotic and color combinations available if

CITADEL CENTURION CP9	
TYPE	Striker fired, recoil operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	9mm
CAPACITY	14+1 rds.
BARREL	4 in., stainless steel
LENGTH	6.75 in.
HEIGHT	5.0 in.
WIDTH	1.2 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 7.8 oz. (tested)
SLIDE	Steel
FRAME	Polymer, black (tested); rubber backstrap, black
SIGHTS	Fixed, white dot (front); notch, white outline (rear); Glock dovetail compatible
TRIGGER	5 lbs., 8 oz. (tested)
SAFETY	Trigger lever, striker interrupter plunger
MSRP	\$399
MANUFACTURER	Citadel Firearms, 800-553-4229, citadelfirearms.com

you don't mind spending a little more cash. Cerakote Gray-, Burnt Bronze-, and OD Green-finished frames, as well as flag-themed models are among the options.

Not only is the CP9 Citadel's first pistol made in the U.S., it definitely wants you to know about it! It is hoping to trade on some of those patriotic vibes. In addition to the "MADE IN USA" marked on the right side of the frame, the slide cover plate reads "USA", the striker cover sports the words "FREEDOM" and "LIBERTY", and the base of the magazine baseplate reads "E PLURIBUS UNUM", Latin for "out of many, one," which is the U.S. motto. Even for all of that, this pistol is remarkably uncluttered; it has a simple and basic appearance.

The barrel is made of stainless steel with what I believe is a nitride coating for corrosion resistance. It sits inside a slide that has aggressive and wide flat-bottomed serrations at the front and rear. At the front, these wrap over the top, which is a very nice touch. Angled slide serrations look classier, perhaps, but most firearm manufacturers seem to be moving to flat-bottomed serrations for two reasons: First, ease of machining. Second, and



The polymer front sight is the Glock type. The front of the slide is contoured and features wide, wrap-around serrations.



With an optic mounted, the polymer sights do not co-witness with the red dot. However, the FastFire 3 features a white line that could aid left-to-right alignment in case of a dead battery.

more important (at least to you), flat-bottomed serrations seem to be the most aggressive, and the least likely to slip out of your fingers if they're sweaty or bloody; those 90-degree angles just dig in to help you hold on.

If this pistol looks a little familiar to you, there could be two reasons for that: There's a slightly different version available from FMK Firearms as the G3 (\$330, fmkfirearms.com). More likely, though, it's this: If you took a class of art school students with no shooting background and told them to draw a "pistol," the silhouette would likely resemble the CP9. These pistols have a generic appearance, vaguely looking like a lot of other pistols — but not looking exactly like any of them; it's not a criticism, simply an observation.

I appreciate that Citadel didn't just offer up a Glock clone. It's not that making good copies of an existing design is easy, but a lot of us appreciate it when a company takes a risk in creating something new. That said, there's no need to reinvent the wheel with every feature. The CP9 uses "Glock compatible" sights, as the website and owner's manual indicates. In fact, the sights on the CP9 seem to be an exact copy of the factory sights that come with a G19. The polymer front sight has a sizable white dot on it, though, secured to the slide by a familiar screw from underneath — just as if it were on a Glock. The polymer rear sight has a bold white outline around the notch — like a Glock's. These sights are easy to use, of course.

Truth bomb here: I'm on record for repeatedly blasting Glock factory sights. Polymer sights have no place on a premium-priced pistol meant for law enforcement and military use, as I see it. The Glock factory sight picture has always been flawed; if you position the front sight so you can see all of the white dot, the top of the front sight sits above the notch. Line them up properly, and the bottom of the dot is cut off. Therefore, precision is difficult. On an entry-level pistol priced 40 percent less than a Glock, these sights are perfectly acceptable. And, if you ever decide to upgrade them, companies who make sights make versions to fit the G19, and thus this gun.



The trigger features a safety lever in the center that protects against unintended trigger pulls. The trigger face is smooth, and the break was found against the frame after 5½ pounds.



Out of the box, the Centurion CP9 includes a polymer coverplate with Citadel logo to protect the factory optic cut.

Just forward of the rear sight you'll spot a polymer plate, which is as the pistol comes from the factory. Remove that plate and you'll see the slide has been machined to accept certain optics. You can direct-mount optics with either the Trijicon RMR or the Doctor, Vortex Venom and Burris Fastfire 3.

Below the slide, the polymer frame offers a grip angle similar to what you'll find with Glock pistols. At the front of the frame is a single-slot rail for mounting lights and lasers, and the pistol's serial number is etched onto a piece of metal set into the frame on the

underside of the rail.

What few markings visible on the pistol are on the right side of the frame. Above the front of the triggerguard in small print you'll find the pistol's patent number, and below that "MADE IN USA". At the rear, above the grip, is "CENTURION CP9" along with the Citadel name and logo. Once you disassemble the pistol, if you push up on the slide stop, you'll see "LEGACY SPORTS INTL, RENO, NV," in small print on the frame.

The magazine release is a polymer button with an unusual shape, roughly a half-circle with a curved serrated face. It protrudes from the frame a short bit, but as you have to push it in nearly all the way before the magazine drops free, you won't be dislodging mags accidentally.

The grip of this pistol feels good in my hand. Unlike a Glock, which runs a rather fat polymer magazine with a steel lining, the CP9 is fed by a slimmer blued-steel



The Centurion CP9 fieldstrips like most striker-fired semiauto Glock clones, revealing a 4-inch stainless-steel barrel, captured guiderod and spring assembly, and a 14-round metal-bodied magazine.

magazine. As a result, the grip is more narrow than you might expect. It's also indented on the sides where you see texturing. Between that and the short reach to the trigger, most people with small hands should be able to run this gun. The magazine has a polymer basepad, which interfaces nicely with the bottom of the frame.

I've got medium-sized hands with skinny fingers. The shallow finger grooves on the front of the frame seemed to fit me just fine. For comparison testing, I showed the pistol to my older son. He has huge hands to match his size 14 feet. He was able to get all of his fingers around the frame of the CP9 — although just barely. He did notice the faint line running along the underside of the triggerguard, though, which was left over from injection molding.

At the rear of the frame is something that I'm surprised more pistol manufacturers aren't doing: A rubber backstrap. You'll note it looks natural on the black model, but the backstrap stands in contrast with the colored frames. Striker-fired pistols are popular for a number of reasons. The low bore helps keep muzzle rise down. Polymer

frames also flex a little when shooting, helping to absorb recoil, though that varies from brand to brand. I much prefer factory Glocks to the clones simply because a Glock has the softest polymer of any pistol on the market; the flexing helps to keep recoil down a bit more, in my opinion. Most people wouldn't admit to noticing the small difference unless they shot the guns side by side, but it's there. But a rubber backstrap? That's genius. I wonder why nobody else offers it.

There are vertical lines down the frontstrap of the pistol, too. The texturing on the sides of the grip is not very aggressive at all, but between the finger grooves, the contouring of the frame, and the rubber backstrap, the CP9 didn't move in my hand while shooting. Ergonomically, this pistol is a winner.

Once you disassemble the CP9, you'll see a simple layout that's similar to other striker-fired designs, but it is not a direct copy of any of them. One detail I found interesting was the slide stop. It is a standard small steel piece with an extended polymer lever attached to it, making it usable as



The slide-stop lever is long and low-profile, and the magazine release button is short, requiring a full press to release the mag. All controls, including the trigger, are made of polymer.

a “slide release.” However, there is only so much real estate on a pistol, so there’s a chance your thumb might contact it while shooting, possibly preventing the slide from locking back. If this proves to be the case for you, it would be easy to trim for being made of polymer.

The trigger is also polymer, and it has the typical safety lever in the center of it. Printed on the left side of the trigger you’ll see “804”, which indicates that this CP9 has the “804 Elite Fast Action Trigger.” This indeed sounds fancy, but the trigger pull on Guns & Ammo’s sample was exactly what we’d expect out of an entry level, striker-fired gun. There is a decent amount of take-up, then a plasticky break. The total pull-weight on our sample was 5½ pounds, but I was surprised it measured that light because it felt heavier. Reset was not bad. Overall, it was shootable, and an apt trigger pull for a mid-size concealed carry pistol meant for self-defense, but it was unimpressive.

What was interesting was where the trigger fired. After the trigger breaks, the trigger shoe is all the way back against the frame, as in the curve of the back of the trigger mates with the curve of the front of the frame.

Between the narrower grip and how far back the trigger pulls, reach to the trigger on the CP9 is much shorter than you’ll find in most pistols this size. If you’ve got small hands, this might be a big selling point for you.

As this was a new — at least to me — design, one meant for concealed carry, I tested the most important aspect of any handgun meant for personal defense: Reliability. At the range, I tried a number of different hollow-point bullet types and weights. Recoil got a bit spicy when I shot +P ammunition, but that’s what I expected with a pistol of this size and weight. I’m pleased to report that



The triggerguard features a high-grip undercut beneath the magazine release button. The frontstrap is serrated and offers finger grooves. The mold seam was discernably felt.



The one magazine was reliable with all 9mm loads. A 10-round mag is optional, and a 17-rounder will be available soon.

the CP9 digested everything without a problem. I do wish the pistol was provided with more than one magazine, however. To hit the price point, only one 14-round magazine is included. I understand that everything costs money, but I’m a firm believer that every detachable mag-fed firearm should come with at least two magazines.

I knocked down steel and shot IDPA silhouettes. Loading and shooting just one magazine, I still got the slide hot to the touch but the gun kept running. I didn’t notice the roughness of the trigger until it was time for accuracy work.

The disadvantages of the CP9 being its own design and not a clone meant that finding dedicated holsters was difficult. Depending on brand and fit, it may or may not fit into holsters made for

the Glock 19 or SIG Sauer P320. When in doubt, head to your local gun store and see what they’ve got to try out.

While it doesn’t look exotic, and it has the trigger pull you might expect of a budget-priced pistol, in every other way the CP9 felt like a more expensive handgun. The slide-to-barrel lockup is solid, resulting in accuracy on par with more expensive pistols of this size. The ergonomics are good, and it was reliable with every hollowpoint round I tried. Not bad for a so-called “entry-level” pistol. **GA**

PERFORMANCE

9MM	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Federal Syntech 130-gr. PCC	982	29	14	2.4	3.4
Federal HST 147-gr. JHP	931	24	10	2.7	3.1
Black Hills 115-gr. TAC-XP +P	1,144	24	9	2.9	3.9
Hornady 124-gr. JHP +P	1,103	31	16	3.1	3.7

Notes: Accuracy is the averages of four, five-shot groups at 25 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured by an Oehler Model 35P chronograph set 12 feet in front of the muzzle.