



HK45 TACTICAL

THE TEUTONIC TALE,
TAKE TWO.
BY TOM BECKSTRAND

The HK45T comes in three colors: black, tan and green. The color is the only difference between them.



Contemporary HK polymer-frame pistols follow an evolutionary pattern. The introduction of a new design is followed by a compact version of that design. Some patterns get specialized features like the Expert or Tactical editions. Each version of the HK design is intended for a particular role, and each model seems to prove more refined than the last.

The latest model of HK pistol arriving in the States is the HK45T, “T” meaning “Tactical.” This pistol was unveiled at the 2013 SHOT Show to the great pleasure of HK aficionados, myself included.

The new pistol is identical to the HK45 except that it comes from the factory with MeproLight night sights and it has a barrel threaded to accept a suppressor. The HK45T isn’t expected to stay in production for long, with only 2,000 black pistols slotted to leave the plant. The tan and green variants will be even harder to find because only 1,000 of those will be made.

The HK45 has made a name for itself in the past few years as being an exceptionally reliable pistol. One pistol trainer and online blogger, Todd Green, even put 50,000 rounds through an HK45 experiencing only two malfunctions, a

light primer strike and a broken trigger return spring. That’s a mean rounds-between-failure rate of 25,000 rounds, which is 10 times the industry standard. In order to understand how HK is able to design a pistol 10 times more durable than the rest of the industry, we need to look at the HK45T’s origins.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

HK formed a new design team in 1989 to begin work on a new HK polymer pistol. Glock had come seemingly out of nowhere two years earlier, and HK could see the end of the P7 pistol line, so they decided they should explore the use of polymers for their next handgun. The new pistol was going to be marketed heavily to consumers in the United States, so HK conducted extensive market analysis in America, a survey upon which they relied heavily as they designed their new pistol. This was “The Word.”

HK set about designing their new pistol just as rumblings were coming from America’s Special Operation Command (SOCOM) that a new pistol solicitation would be forthcoming. HK decided early on that their new offering had to be equally capable for the American commercial market, law enforcement authorities and militaries of the world. As a result of this accepted premise, modularity and easy configuration became part of the design focus.

The name HK gave to their new pistol was the Universal Self-loading Pistol, or USP. The USP incorporated a new polymer frame with a buffered Browning locking system. In order to make these two simple



The threaded barrel of the 45T is ready to accept any suppressor with matching thread pitch.

and robust components work together effectively, HK had to spend some time and money getting the slide design right. If you compare the USP slide with slides from other polymer-frame pistol manufacturers, you’ll notice how much higher up into the slide the HK polymer frame sits.

The greater overlap between the frame and the slide is a trait unique to HK’s product line, to include the HK45T. I have never been a member of HK’s design team, but to my untrained eye it looks like the increased purchase between frame and slide not only makes for a stronger design but a more accurate gun as well. There would be much less frame flex and more consistent lockup with the HK pistol when compared with pistols from other manufacturers.

The buffered Browning locking system was a design first pioneered by none other than John Moses Browning. Browning’s design is simple and strong and has locking lugs near the barrel hood that mate to grooves in the underside of the slide. The design allows the barrel to connect firmly with the slide, so lockup between the two is strong. When we fire the pistol, the slide and barrel move rearward together for a few milliseconds (ensuring the chamber pressures stay contained) before the barrel moves



down and out of the way and the slide continues rearward through the extraction and feeding cycle.

While the Browning system is superb and has been working well for more than 100 years, it can be improved. HK did away with machining lugs near the barrel hood and uses the barrel hood as a lug itself. This further simplified Browning's design. Next up for HK's improvements was the addition of an internal buffering system. HK initially used a dual-spring assembly for the full-size USP. One short, stiff buffering spring absorbs the impact of the unlocking barrel while a second recoil spring controls movement of the slide. It is a complex and effective design.

Starting with the USP compact and continuing to the HK45T that now sits on my desk, HK simplified the buffering component of their modified Browning design and now uses a flat wire spring and a polymer buffering sleeve. The flat wire spring can cycle more times before it takes "a set," giving the new design a less intensive maintenance schedule, and the polymer sleeve absorbs the impact that the buffer spring once managed. The new design is much simpler.

OLD VERSUS NEW

I'm not inclined to automatically assume a new pistol is better than its predecessor. Part of the USP life cycle was the development of the USP Tactical, the predecessor of the HK45T. I owned a USP Tactical for several years and think highly of that pistol. However, most of the changes made between the USP Tactical and the HK45T make the latter even a better pistol.

The USP Tactical is a full-size USP .45 with some of HK's Mark 23 splashed in for good measure (the MK23 was the pistol HK designed for SOCOM in the early '90s). The USP Tactical has a threaded barrel, high-profile sights that work well with a suppressor

The HK45T is internally identical to the HK45. The 45T features the relocated magazine release and a smooth undercut triggerguard.

The forward slide serrations facilitate an easy press-check, even with a suppressor attached.

HK45T

Type	Recoil-operated semiautomatic with modified Browning locking system
Caliber	.45 ACP
Capacity	10 rds.
Barrel	5.16 in.
Overall Length	8.73 in.
Overall Height	5.51 in.
Weight	1.98 lbs.
Grip	Removable backstraps, checkered
Finish	HK hostile environment (steel)
Trigger	DA/SA
Sights	Meprolight w/tritium inserts
Safety	External thumb safety w/decock
MSRP	\$1,461
Manufacturer	HK 706-568-1906 hecklerkoch-usa.com



There will be 2,000 black HK45Ts manufactured ...



... only 1,000 OD-green HK45Ts manufactured ...



... and 1,000 tan-frame 45Ts. Don't forget that HK loyalists are hoarders.

and an adjustable trigger. I still miss that trigger. It was the best factory trigger I've ever fired. The combination found with the USP Tactical incorporates all of the best features of the USP and the Mark 23 without the excessive size or expense of the Mark 23.

My complaint with my old USP Tactical was that the ergonomics weren't that great. The grip was square and uncomfortable in the hand. The magazine release ran underneath the triggerguard where the triggerguard meets the grip's frontstrap. The location of the magazine release always puzzled me. Custom gun makers make a lot of money undercutting this area so shooters can grip the pistol as high as possible, then they smooth it out so the middle finger of the firing hand doesn't blister during lengthy range sessions. In the middle of this very key real estate, HK once parked a rectangular magazine release that chews up the shooter's finger.

With the new HK45T, HK fixed the location of the magazine release. They moved it inside the undercut triggerguard, then smoothed the junction where the triggerguard meets the frontstrap, much like the work we see coming from custom pistolsmiths. This feature alone made switching from the USP Tactical to an HK45T worth it. HK also changed the shape of the magazine release from a rectangle to two small paddles on either side of the triggerguard. The design is completely ambidextrous, unobtrusive and easy to manipulate.

HK continued the improvements by getting rid of the USP's square grip shape and incorporating the grip from their P30, commonly referred to as the "Spiderman" grip. It is much more ergonomic and allows the shooter to choose the size of the backstrap. The HK45T has a slender, semi-double-stack magazine that keeps the grip circumference to a minimum. Being able to choose the shape of the backstrap allows the shooter to choose which is more comfortable.

Unfortunately for the HK45T, gone are the high-profile sights that adorn the USP Tactical. The Meprolight sights on the 45T are much preferred to the other factory HK sights that have luminescent paint on them, but they are not tall enough to use once a suppressor is attached. It is still possible to shoot semi-accurately by using the Meprolights, much as we would an occluded sight, but I'd still prefer fixed night sights tall enough to see over a can.

We also lost the USP Tactical's super-sweet trigger. In its place is HK's standard DA/SA trigger. The trigger works just fine, but it makes me pine for the other adjustable model of the USP Tactical.

Features we gained with the HK45T are a standard Picatinny rail on the frame's dustcover. This is a tremendous improvement over the proprietary system HK uses on the USP Tactical. Any weapon-mounted light that uses a Pic rail can attach to the 45T. This is a welcome change.

Perhaps the feature that makes the HK45T the most unique of all of HK's newest pistols is the fact that they kept the detent plate system from the USP instead of transitioning to the newer P2000/P30 system. The older detent plate

The slender 10-round mags slip easily into the magazine well.



The safety is reversible and, when coupled with the magazine and slide releases, completely ambidextrous.



system that the USP uses makes it possible for the shooter to set up his pistol in nine different variations, from double-action only to DA/SA to HK's superb LEM. It takes just a few simple tools and a new plate (that costs about \$12) to change your pistol to whatever variant you choose.

Newer pistols from HK don't offer quite as much flexibility between variants. For example, if you purchase a P30 v2, it can never be changed to a v3. Fortunately, the HK45T retains the detent plates, so all options are available to the shooter.

RANGE TIME

I was able to evaluate the HK45T both with and without the suppressor. The suppressor I used was a Knight's Armament USP-T .45. The suppressor threaded directly onto the HK45T without a problem. Unfortunately, there was an average of two stovepipes per magazine when suppressed. I don't know if the problem was the can or the ammo, but brass would just barely clear the ejection port and occasionally get caught on the way out. The suppressor was designed for the USP Tac-



Performance

Ammo	Best group (in.)	Avg. group (in.)
ASYM 230-gr. JHP	1.38	1.56
Federal 230-gr. GMM	1.29	1.78
Speer Lawman 230-gr.	1.72	2.03

tical and not the HK45T, so I'm sure the issue can easily be corrected.

The HK45T is an extremely soft-shooting .45. It is also very accurate. I fired five-shot groups from a sandbagged rest at 25 meters to evaluate the pistol's accuracy potential. The three loads I tested were Speer Lawman 230-grain TMJ, ASYM .45 ACP Tactical 230-grain JHP and Federal's 230-grain FMJ Gold Medal Match.

The ASYM ammunition was the most consistent, with groups averaging 1.56 inches. The best group with the ASYM ammo measured 1.38 inches. Federal Gold Medal Match had a group average of 1.78, but the best single group measured only 1.29 inches. The Speer Lawman averaged 2.03 inches, with the best group measuring 1.72 inches. With most of the groups hovering at just over 1½ inches, the HK45T is the most accurate factory pistol I've ever evaluated.

The HK45T incorporates all of the best features of the time-tested USP line with the better layout and ergonomics of HK's more contemporary line. The plate detent system allows the shooter to set up his pistol with a number of different fire control systems and ensures that the shooter has exactly what he wants but also allows him to experiment. The newer ergonomics offer significantly more comfort than what's found on the USP, especially with the relocation of the magazine release. It's like HK's polymer-frame pistol line had an orgy and the 45T walked away with all of the hotness and none of the baggage. ☹