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OUT OF THE DESERT

**STEEL-PISTOL
FANS REJOICE!
THE BABY
DESERT EAGLE
HAS RETURNED.**

BY PATRICK SWEENEY



It may surprise you to discover that there was a 9mm handgun that actually drew praise from the late Col. Jeff Cooper, that pistol being the CZ-75. Back when the pistol options were few and polymer was only for use in consumer electronics, the 75 offered several benefits: You could carry it cocked and locked; you could ease the hammer down and use it double-action on the first shot; and it held a lot of ammo. Granted, they were “only” 9mm—this was before the days of reliably expanding bullets, and +P and +P+ loads—but the CZ-75 housed a lot of them.

The best part was the grip. The CZ-75 possessed the most ergonomic handgun grip to be had, short of finding a custom grip maker to carve you a set of wooden grips. They were so comfortable and ergonomic that when it came time to design Cooper’s baby, the Bren Ten, the CZ-75 grip was used as the grip model.

Alas, the CZ-75 was made in Czechoslovakia, a Commie country then (now the democratic Czech Republic) and thus off-limits for U.S. gun buyers. The Bren Ten met an untimely demise, but the 75 was so popular that handgun makers who could export to the U.S. simply copied it and shipped clones here.

One of those was a company known as Israeli Military Industries, now known as Israeli Weapon Industries or IWI. It’s the manufacturer behind the new Baby Desert Eagle II, which is imported by Magnum Research, and it’s a gun that owes a ton to the CZ-75.

What possible attraction could an “old” all-steel design such as this have in the age of polymer frames and striker-fired mechanisms? You’d be surprised.

IWI has a couple of decades of experience at making this model, and it shows. Available in 9mm or .40 S&W, the Baby Desert Eagle II is listed as being 38 ounces. My sample weighed 41 ounces with empty magazine inserted, and that’s a lot if you’re accustomed to polymer-frame pistols that weigh on the order of 22 to 24 ounces.

However, sometimes a bit of heft is a good thing—like when you’re shooting your handgun. Some of the USPSA/IPSC Grand Masters are known to shoot handguns even heavier than the Baby Desert Eagle II.

The weight is also increased by the recent addition of an accessory rail, a place to park a light or laser. It too is steel (an integral part of the frame) and certainly adds a couple of ounces to the total. There is room enough there for most any light or laser, and a really compact one

would be barely noticed.

Up top we have a slide that rides within the frame rails. Unlike the 1911 and other Browning designs, the slide rail grooves are inside the frame, and the result is an interesting combination. For its size, the Baby Desert Eagle II’s slide is a bit lighter than, say, a 1911, and the axis of the bore is closer to your hand than it would be in a 1911.

On top of that slide we have combat sights (low and ramped) set into transverse dovetails. If you need to adjust, you simply drift them from side to side. The top of the slide is grooved between the sights to draw your eye and align the pistol as you present it on the draw.

The barrel is built with an integral ramp, and the locking and unlocking are done by means of a kidney-shaped slot cut into the lug under the chamber. Rather than use a separate link, or an open slot such as the Browning Hi Power (and all the derivatives thereof), the Czech designers went with an enclosed slot, the kidney-shaped cam slot.

The barrel and slide design also dispenses with a bushing. The slide is bored for the barrel, and the barrel diameter is matched to the slide. It is a precise way to make slides and barrels, although it does rather limit the options of a gunsmith.

The barrel has polygonal rifling, so if one of the old-timers at your gun club peers down the bore, don’t be surprised if he says something about the rifling being worn out. It isn’t; the lands and grooves are just rounded, not square on their edges.

The extractor is a simple external extractor, pivoting on a pin driven down into the slide and actuated by a spring at the rear.

In decades of seeing the CZ-75 and its iterations fired, I’ve never heard of an extractor that wasn’t up to the job. Even when IPSC competitors were hot-rodding their 75s and shooting Major (back in those days, a 115-grain jacketed hollowpoint at a blistering 1,530 fps) the extractors did not give them problems. →

OUT OF THE DESERT

← The ambidextrous safety is on the slide, and it's a hammer-dropping and de-linking safety. That is, it blocks the firing pin and drops the hammer, and if you leave it down, it takes the trigger out of the firing mechanism linkage—leaving you with a pistol that won't fire.

Inside the slide, the firing pin has a passive locking block, so unless you've pulled the trigger, the firing pin isn't going to do anything it isn't told to. In short, it can't reach the primer without your permission. It also won't go off if dropped and so forth.

The frame has a trigger guard with a squared profile, and the front face of it is grooved. My shooting buddies and I experimented with getting our support hand up on the gun and putting that index finger around the trigger guard. What we found was that, for most of us, it didn't help. But if you find it helps, the trigger guard is there for you. And if it doesn't, it isn't in the way. Just consider it a retro, 1980s affectation.

Behind the trigger guard is a magazine button, right where you'd want it. And inside is a swoopy, curved trigger. Remember, the Baby Desert Eagle II is a traditional double-action pistol, and for that a curved trigger is better than a straight (or straighter) one. As your trigger

finger cams the mechanism back, your finger slides on the trigger, and the geometry of the finger/trigger relationship stays the same.

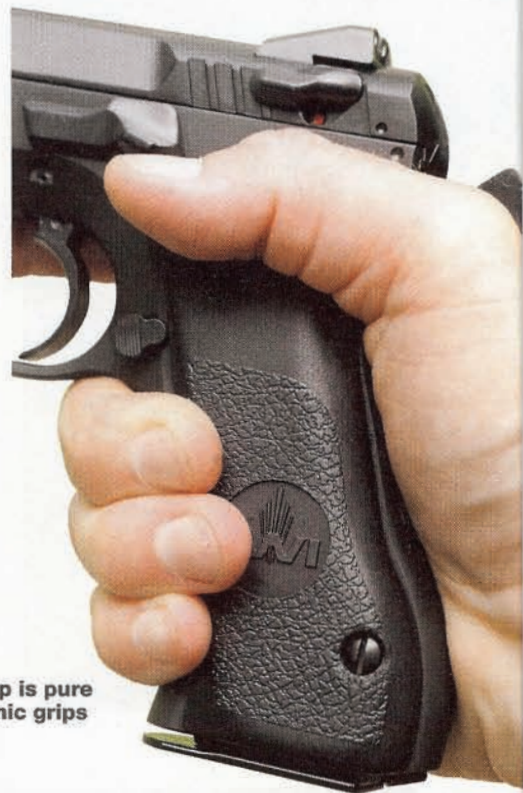
With a straighter trigger, you'd likely find the changing geometry causing your front sight to move, or at least I do. Stroking through on double action, for me the front sight stays right where I want it to. And on subsequent single-action shots the shape of the trigger makes no difference.

The grips are a hard polymer, with a nonslip pattern in them, as well as the IWI logo. Inside, the Baby Desert Eagle II uses the standard CZ-75 magazine, a magazine you can get anywhere, and which in its standard form holds 15 to 16 rounds. (Magnum Research says 15, but I've had box-stock 75 magazines hold 16.) Aftermarket magazines are available to hold up to 19 rounds. In .40 S&W, the capacities are 12 to 14.

Those 41 ounces don't seem so much once you wrap your hand around the frame of the Baby Desert Eagle II. The ergonomic grip is still there, and the nonslip polymer grips keep the frame in place once you have gotten your hands around it.

And when it comes to the recoil of

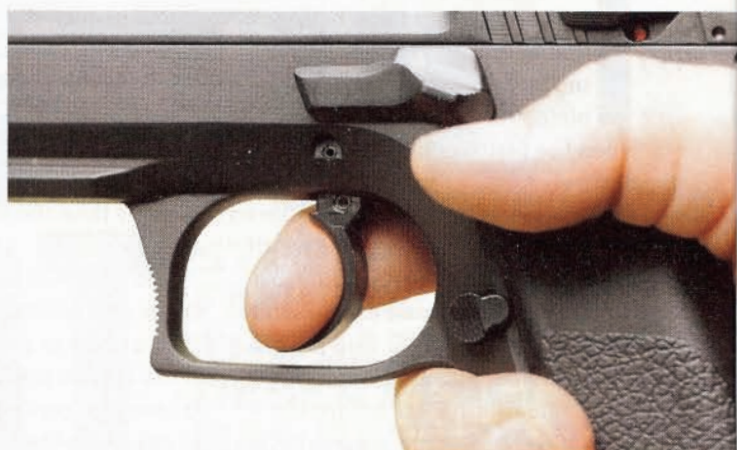
+P and/or +P+ ammo, an ergonomic grip and 37 ounces to start with do a whole lot to tame felt recoil. So much so that when I first fired the Baby Desert Eagle II, I was using mild-recoiling factory 115-grain full-metal-jacket ammo. With a velocity of only around 1,075 fps, this is really soft to shoot in lighter handguns. In the Baby Desert Eagle II, I fired the first shot and stopped. It really had felt as if the slide hadn't cycled enough to toss out the empty and chamber a fresh round. →



➤ The Baby Desert Eagle II's grip is pure CZ-75, one of the most ergonomic grips of all time.



▲ The pistol's safety drops the hammer and also de-links the trigger from the firing system, so if it's in the down/Safe position, the gun will not fire.



▲ The curved trigger helps you pull straight through in double-action mode. The front of the trigger guard is squared and grooved.

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Well, it had done all it was supposed to do: fire, extract, eject, feed, chamber and lock. The low bore axis, and the mass of the pistol, combined to make it feel as if it hadn't, as if I had fired a .22 LR or something.

Accuracy shooting was fun, and the trigger made it easy, too. It is not the usual "glass rod" trigger that we're all told to lust after. The DA/SA mechanism doesn't permit that. What you feel in single action, however, is quite nice. You take up the slack, and then there is a small amount of rolling resistance

as the trigger cams the sear off the hammer hooks. Like a good double-action revolver, there is no way to predict the hammer fall, so all you can do is focus on the front sight and follow through, almost always for a good hit.

In an impromptu competition with fellow law enforcement instructors, we engaged plates at 70 yards. You got two shots to make a hit, which allowed you to move on to the next plate. Winning score was the longest string of consecutive plates hit. Using Hornady Steel Match ammo, I won with eight plates in a row. That


speaks to the accuracy of the gun and to its trigger design. Unable to anticipate the trigger, all I could do was keep the sights on the plate as I rolled through the trigger.


In regular 9mm loadings, the recoil of the Baby Desert Eagle II is soft, really soft. Even when fed +P or +P+ ammo, the all-steel design and the ergonomic grip shape make it no big deal to be squirting bullets out at Mach 1.3.

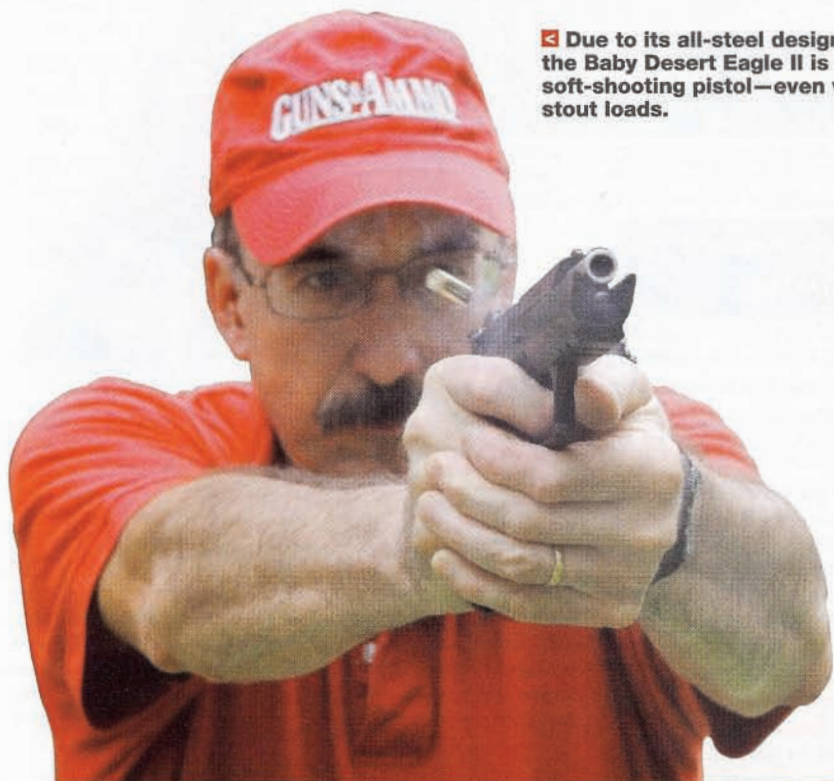
I'll admit, as a daily concealed-carry pistol, the Baby Desert Eagle II would be a lot to carry. It might even be too much. However, as an open carry, duty or military side-arm, it would be exemplary.

Compared to my traditional favorite, the 1911, the Baby Desert Eagle II with two loaded spare magazines would have the same weight as a Government model and its two spares. But you could have 46 to 50 rounds of 9mm, versus 25 of .45 ACP.

If you simply can't bring yourself to carry a "mere" 9mm or a .40 S&W, then Magnum Research can help you there. It also imports the Baby Desert Eagle II in .45 ACP (albeit in a bigger frame), and the magazines hold 10 rounds each.

Plastic may be fantastic, but there's a reason steel is still with us. And there are good reasons for all-steel handguns. The Baby Desert Eagle II is an example. 

 Due to its all-steel design, the Baby Desert Eagle II is one soft-shooting pistol—even with stout loads.



ACCURACY RESULTS | MAGNUM RESEARCH BABY DESERT EAGLE II

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Standard Deviation	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady FTX	115	1,083	21.9	2.0
Hornady Steel Match HAP	125	1,099	17.9	2.5
Michigan Ammo TMJ	115	1,151	47.5	3.5
Speer Gold Dot HP	115	1,217	11.1	3.0
Winchester PDX1	147	1,042	9.7	2.5
Winchester Ranger JHP +P+	115	1,348	37.2	3.5
Wolf FMJ	115	1,127	10.2	3.5
Black Hills red box JHP	124	1,111	13.3	3.0
Zero FMJ	124	1,155	32.3	3.5

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards off an MTM K-Zone shooting rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots measured on a PACT MKIV chronograph set 15 feet from the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; HP, hollowpoint; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; TMJ, total metal jacket

MAGNUM RESEARCH BABY DESERT EAGLE II

TYPE: double-action/single action semiauto

CALIBER: 9mm Luger (tested), .40 S&W

CAPACITY: 15+1

BARREL: 4.52 in.

OAL/WIDTH/HEIGHT: 8.25/1.13/5.75 in.

WEIGHT: 41 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: all-steel

FINISH: black oxide

GRIPS: molded polymer

SIGHTS: 3-dot

SAFETY: trigger-blocking, hammer-dropping

TRIGGER: 10 lb. double-action

PRICE: \$630

MANUFACTURER: Israeli Weapons Industries

IMPORTER: Magnum Research, MAGNUM

RESEARCH.COM