

# FULL THROTTLE

*THIS SPECIAL KAHR CW380 OFFERS  
RACY CARBON-FIBER LOOKS  
IN A TINY PACKAGE*

BY DENIS PRISBREY

**P**ocket pistols are popular.  
They sell well. People like them.

There are many reasons for this, but the biggest one that overrides all the others is that they're small enough and light enough to actually carry, on a regular basis, all day long and just about everywhere. Whether they're carried as primary guns in a concealed-carry role or as backups for law enforcement personnel, they don't create "He's got a gun!" bulges under clothing, and they don't drag your pants or purse down in daily life.

Pocket pistols have evolved over the years, from the mostly symbolic vest-pocket .25s on through the larger .32s and .380s of much of the 1900s, and today we have some true engineering marvels in what some companies have been able to achieve





You won't find any sharp edges on the Kahr CW380 Black Carbon Fiber. Note the rather smooth edges on the trigger, slide stop, magazine baseplate and ejection port.



with fewer machining operations, roll marking instead of engraved markings and one magazine instead of two.

#### ► A CLOSER LOOK

If a diminutive pistol meets your needs, this gun is it. With a 2.58-inch barrel, an overall length of 4.96 inches and a weight of 10.2 ounces without the stainless steel mag inserted, I can lay it down on a flat desktop and entirely cover it with my hand. The stainless steel slide is lightly beveled at the rear, and more so at the front, with rear cocking serrations, a sizable ejection port and a matte stainless finish. Aside from the excellent steel three-dot sights on top, the only protrusion anywhere that might catch against a hand in running this little workhorse is the left-side slide-stop, and since that's an MIM piece, there are no sharp edges to remove skin.

The gun is also a striker-fired design with a stainless steel trigger that feels and works like a long double-action trigger with no second-strike capability. This eliminates the need for any type of manual safety, and the vertically serrated magazine release button sticks out

in maximizing ballistic firepower while minimizing the overall size of the package involved.

While it's true that a genuine pocket pistol is always going to be limited in power, the fact remains that the gun you'll have on you beats any gun you left sitting in the safe back home. Twenty-five years ago, when the nationwide trend toward the expansion of concealed-carry permits began, it generated a new market segment that flocked to get those permits and the equipment to carry under their authority. New gun buyers, and old hands with existing favorites, heeded the old advice to "Carry the most powerful gun you can shoot well" and strapped on full-sized .45 ACPs, .40s, 9mms, .357s and so on.

While a good percentage stuck to their guns and toughed it out, others quickly found out that a full-sized .45 ACP or high-capacity 9mm could get heavy quickly and demanded certain wardrobe adaptations for concealment. That led, inevitably, to mass defections from the "Bigger Is Better Academy" to the "Hey, I Hardly Even Know It's There

Club," and a corresponding surge in smaller pocket pistol development.

Kahr Arms boarded that bandwagon early on with its innovative locked-breech compacts designed by company founder Justin Moon, and it's been a name to look for in the pocket pistol genre ever since. Which brings us to the subject of this review: The Kahr CW380 Black Carbon Fiber.

The CW380 is intended to be the budget version of Kahr's older P380, but don't let that B-word throw you; this isn't a cheap weekend special. The CW380 differs from the more expensive P380 in having conventional rifling as opposed to match-grade polygonal rifling, an MIM slide stop lever, a simplified slide

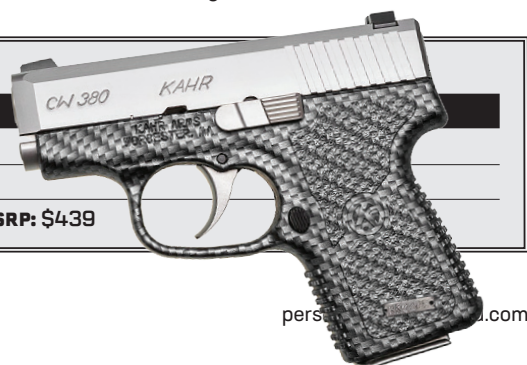
#### ■ SPECIFICATIONS

##### KAHR CW380 BLACK CARBON FIBER

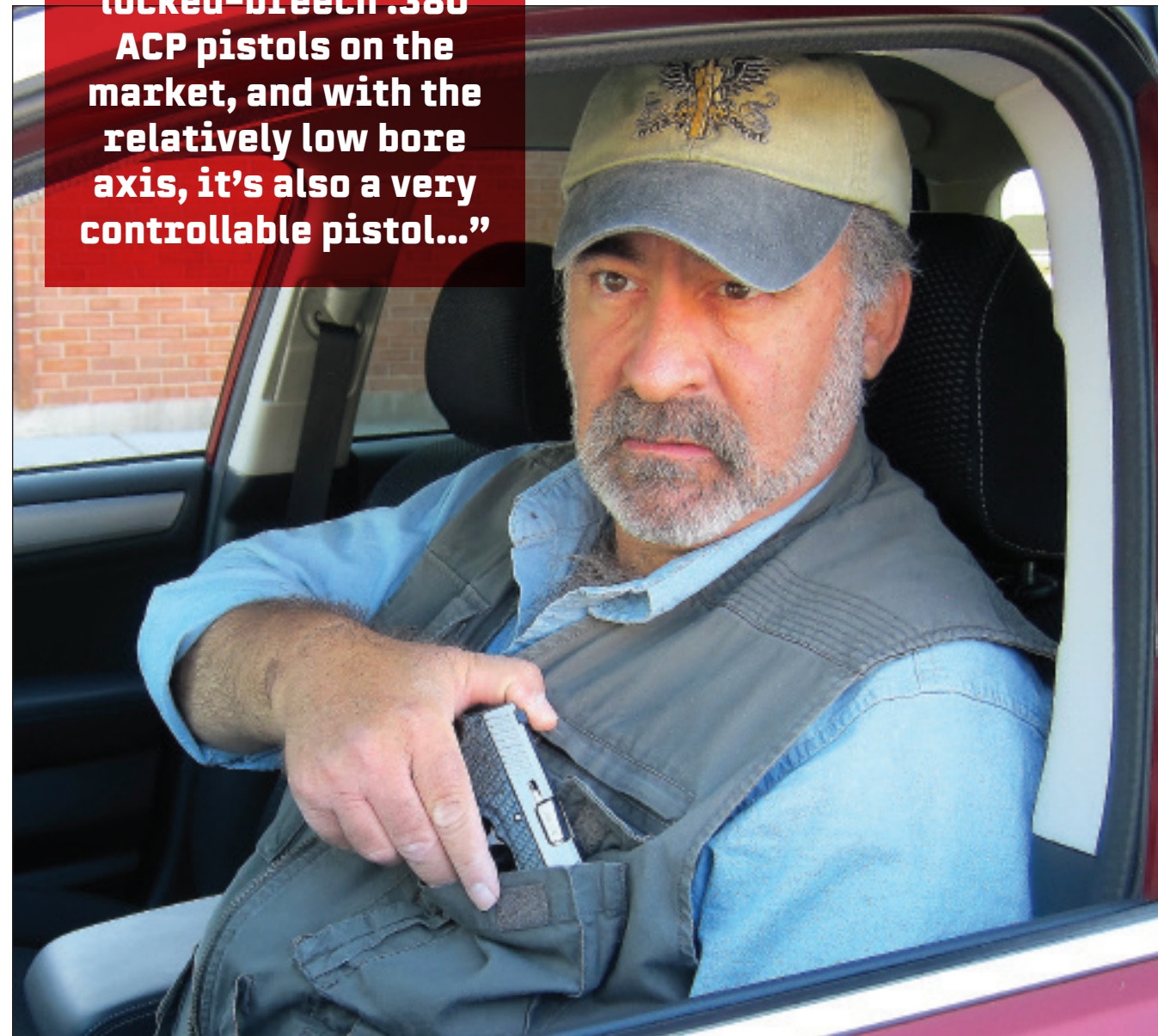
**CALIBER:** .380 ACP / **BARREL:** 2.58 inches / **OA LENGTH:** 4.96 inches

**WEIGHT:** 10.2 ounces (empty) / **GRIP:** Polymer / **ACTION:** Striker-fired

**SIGHTS:** Three-dot **FINISH:** Stainless, black carbon fiber / **CAPACITY:** 6+1 / **MSRP:** \$439



**"...the Kahr CW380 is one of the smallest locked-breech .380 ACP pistols on the market, and with the relatively low bore axis, it's also a very controllable pistol..."**



just enough for easy activation without creating the risk of an accidental magazine dump in your pocket.

The CW380 is centered around Moon's ingenious offset feed ramp, and this design feature is what allows a locked-breech pistol with this type of trigger to shrink so far. Both the feed ramp and the barrel's recoil lug are offset to the left, allowing the trigger bar to ride alongside the barrel on its right, instead of below it, as with most

other pistols. In building a small .380 ACP, there are two choices: a blowback action that requires more slide mass to contain the recoil impulses, or a locked-breech action that doesn't need as much slide mass and allows for a smaller overall package. In short, thanks to Moon's offset design, the Kahr CW380 is one of the smallest locked-breech .380 ACP pistols on the market, and with the relatively low bore axis, it's also a very controllable pistol,

offering a quick recovery between shots.

The new part is the frame's carbon-fiber image. In the interests of full disclosure, let me say that I've worked with literally dozens of polymer-framed pistols of numerous brands and sizes over the years, and I toss that in as background for saying that the finish on this gun is far superior to 99.99% of the bare-naked polymer material used on other guns in terms of traction. Of course, the carbon fiber isn't



really carbon fiber. It's a hydro-dipped pattern on top of the standard polymer. The thing to concentrate on here is that besides the distinctive looks (and much more interesting visual appeal), the surface treatment leaves a semi-tacky feel in hand that teams up extremely well with the molded-in serrations on the front- and backstraps to make sure the Kahr doesn't wander under recoil, especially if you need a string of rapid fire. I quite like it, and I'd like to see more of it.

#### ► EARNING ITS KEEP

Can a tiny pocket pistol be accurate? The biggest limiting factors in how well a tiny gun like the CW380 shoots are the sights, the trigger and

**"...the Kahr was more accurate with my all of my test loads than I had expected... and I didn't experience a single malfunction during my range session."**



your hand size. Assuming your mitts aren't too large to make it impractical for you, it's possible to be accurate despite the gun only allowing a two-finger hold. The steel sights on this pistol are head and shoulders above what you find on many others in its class—big enough to be actually seen—and with enough room in the rear notch to clearly center the front blade.

The trigger? Well, admittedly it's not "target grade," but this isn't a target pistol, and it's steel, unlike the plastic



The CW380's three-dot sights are relatively large, easy to see and made of steel, which is pretty rare among pistols of this size.

triggers on other similarly sized pocket pistols. The trigger pull is long but smooth and should only be a problem for those with limited hand strength. A side note here: Because of the stiff dual recoil spring system used, working the slide will be more difficult than some potential buyers can manage, and you're not going to clear malfunctions as quickly as you would with a larger gun. I had a hard time using the cocking serrations myself and found it much easier to anchor my thumb and index finger on the front slide bevels to chamber a round instead. This isn't ideal, but I kept slipping off those rear serrations.

What about the accuracy? On the test day, I shot the CW380 at an indoor range with another pocket pistol, a single-action .32 ACP. Considering the



Kahr Arms offers a number of holsters for its pistols, including this Mitch Rosen pocket rig.

trigger on the Kahr and the almost non-existent sights on the other pistol, I set my targets at 10 yards and used a solid rest. And the Kahr was more accurate with my all of my test loads than I had expected, even at that distance, and I didn't experience a single malfunction during my range session. The recoil was surprisingly light, and the gun didn't shift in my hand at all while firing a full magazine as quickly as I could pull the trigger. At the same time, all of my shots stayed inside an area that would've been covered by a human silhouette.

I'd like to see a double-strike capability and an easier-to-rack slide, but those

are fair tradeoffs for the Kahr CW380's size, reliability, sights and grippy pseudo-carbon-fiber texture. This gun offers a lot of value for your money, and Kahr

offers several holsters for it on its website, including the sturdy hard-molded Mitch Rosen pocket rig I used here. For more information, visit [kahr.com](http://kahr.com). **PDW**

#### ■ PERFORMANCE

##### KAHR CW380 BLACK CARBON FIBER

LOAD	ACCURACY
► BLAZER 95 FMJ	1.31
► SIG SAUER 90 V-CROWN JHP	1.31
► SPEER 95 LAWMAN TMJ	1.24
► WINCHESTER 95 PDX1	0.94

Bullet weight measured in grains and accuracy in inches for best five-shot groups at 10 yards.

