

Review: Kahr's New S9 Semi-Auto Pistol

By Nick Sisley

If you're a gun enthusiast, you probably know that Worcester, Mass.-based Kahr Firearms specializes in semi-auto pistols. Until mid-2017, its handgun offerings included a Premium and a Value Series. Last year, Kahr introduced a new S Series. Let's take a look at how the S Series differs from Kahr's prior lines.

The S Series takes many of the top features of the Premium line and incorporates them into the new S Series — but with a price increase of less than \$40 over the Value Series. One important change to the S Series is a change that customers suggested and Kahr implemented: the addition of two white-dot sights on the rear sight (matched up with a white dot on the front sight.) The result is easier and quicker target-sight acquisition.

Another new feature of the S series is the accessory rail under the barrel. (See photo above). The purpose of this rail, of course, is to accommodate the addition of some type of optic or light sight. There are many sight options for this; most are for use at relatively short ranges (i.e. some type of light shining on the target.) Such "light" additions

aren't effective at ranges exceeding about 20 feet. This is a good time to point out that Kahr's semi-auto handguns are aimed at customers looking for a self-defense weapon (more about that shortly.)

A third new feature of the S Series is additional serrations at the front of the slide. Kahr's handguns have always had grip serrations at the rear of the slide, and that remains the case on the S Series. The addition of front serrations simply adds another option for slide pull back.

Two more new features round out the additions to the S Series — a redesigned magazine base and grip, and a limited lifetime warranty and two magazines. All these features add up to a considerable value considering the S Series costs only \$40 more than the Value Series.

Sophisticated CNC machines work to very close tolerances. Because of the tight CNC machining tolerances to the S9 and other Kahr semi-autos, keep in mind that a bit of break-in time is required. I'm not talking hundreds of rounds of break-in, but more like 50 or so rounds. Personally, I saw the break-in change in less than 50 rounds of shooting. The differences I saw were in effort to pull back the slide and in the

reduced trigger pull.

The S9 does require a bit more effort in slide pull back than some semi-autos of this ilk from other pistol manufacturers. This shows up in gun shops when potential customers ask to handle new guns fresh from the case. Don't necessarily view the ease of pulling back the slide as a *major* benefit. The increased effort with the Kahr slide is probably due to the close tolerances the Kahr guns are built to, and the fact that the Kahr gun, the S9 in 9mm is built to take +P ammo. If the gun is to be used for self-defense, this can be important as more velocity, especially +P with hollow-point ammo designed for such work, can mean more bullet expansion and deeper penetration than non +P loads. Again, the S9 is built for +P ammo use. Not all semi-autos, especially the smaller ones, are built as rugged as the Kahr.

Ideal for carried defense. When discussing handguns carried for defense, the operative word is "carried." A gun that is too heavy or too bulky won't be



carried – or won't be carried all the time. The S9 is a lightweight 21.8 ounces with seven rounds of Remington 124 grain Jacketed Hollow Point Golden Saber (+P) rounds in the clip and an empty chamber. This light weight is accomplished largely with the gun's polymer frame. The slide is matte stainless steel. The barrel is Match Grade with the Premium Series guns according to Kahr's Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Frank Harris. The S9

barrel is conventional with 1 in 10" twist.

In regard to the effort to pull back the slide, Harris noted that, "The easier it is to pull back the slide, the more felt recoil will be experienced. This is a result of the spring that helps operate the semi-auto action. We wanted to reduce felt recoil in our Kahr guns as much as possible, especially since they are designed to shoot the +P ammo. The heavier spring we use helps reduce recoil. The

tradeoff is the slide may require a bit more effort to pull back."

I've been putting the S9 through the mill at the range, but there's also an ST. This one has a slightly longer barrel (4 inches compared to the S9's 3.6-inch barrel.) The ST has a few other different features, too.

Both the S9 and ST operate by Double Action Only. There is no safety other than the trigger itself, which means a very long trigger pull before the shooter gets to the final pull that sets off the gun. Kahr calls this a "safe-cam" action with locked breech (until the final stage of the trigger pull) with a Browning-type recoil lug and a passive striker block with no magazine disconnect.

Regarding the gun's reduced recoil, Harris also noted that the barrel sits very low, closer to the grip. This means less muzzle flip and reduced recoil. The magazine is single stack and there's no hammer in this striker-fired handgun. Maybe the Kahr guns are especially designed for the guy or gal who wants to step up from another semi-auto? Further, he noted, Kahr's tight CNC machining is especially important to the slide tolerances.

The black rear sight with the two white dots is windage adjustable. Mine shot right on re-windage, but if you must move this rear sight be careful. If you're not experienced seek a gunsmith's advice. Use a wood block for movement. Use metal and you will easily mar the sight's surface and perhaps the slide as well. The front sight (also black with white dot above) is not adjustable. I liked the black rear and front sights in conjunction with the three white dots because it resulted in easy-to-see contrast. When I matched up the two white dots on the rear sight with the white dot on the front sight, bullet impact with the three different loads I put through the gun was

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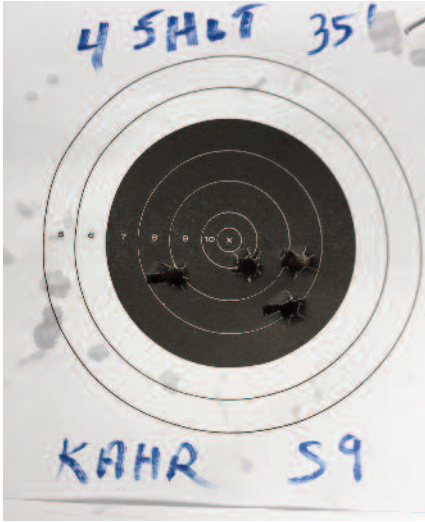
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A four-shot target fired with the Kahr S9 at 35 feet.

right on. Those loads were the Remington 9m Luger (+P) 124 grain Jacketed Hollow Point, the Federal 115 grain Full Metal Jacket, and the Blaser 115 grain Full Metal Jacket. The S9 comes with two seven-round clips and the ST9 comes with two eight-round clips.

There were no malfunctions with any of the approximately 150 rounds I shot from the S9 in five separate shooting sessions. I thought the trigger pulls were quite heavy, but as my shooting progressed maybe those pulls lightened a bit. Also, there were times when the trigger pulls seemed quite light — the gun going off a bit unexpectedly — though still safely.

The gun feels good in the hand. The sides of the black polymer stock have a mottled feel with checkered-type humps at the front of the grip. I liked the feel of both. There are also so-called checkered humps on the back of the grip. I could feel these during recoil, but I fixed that by shooting with light gloves

The magazine release is on the left behind the trigger, the standard place for such semi-auto releases. The slide catch is also in the standard spot for semi-auto pistols, on the left above the trigger.

The clip has a slight forward extension, which was a comfortable place for my pinky finger to ride. The trigger let off on my Lyman Digital Trigger Pull Scale was six pounds.

Alex Zidock and his wife JoAnne produce the long-running weekly television show “Out in the Open.” I asked Alex for his thought on the smaller Kahr CM9 that he prefers because, “As with David and Goliath, you can pick a small stone and still learn to hit with it.” That CM9 model incorporates all seven of the company’s patents but is about 1/2-inch smaller (three-inch barrel) than the S9. It still has a polymer frame and stainless slide. Both the CM9 and the S9 are slim, light, and ideal for carry inside the belt or in a pocket or purse.

If you’re looking for a solid carry gun, stop by your local NBS member-retailer and check out these offerings from Kahr!

