

## GUN TEST

# CHARLES DALY ZDA 9mm

**Sure shooting firepower for both righties and lefties!**

**By Paul Markel**

**O**ver the years I've been able to talk with firearms instructors and trainers from all over the country. During a recent conversation we were discussing the traditional double-action service pistol. The primary topic was the difficulty that many law enforcement officers still have with the long DA trigger stroke.

My friend and I were discussing a phenomenon we had both witnessed while observing other officers during an annual firearms qualification. Quite frequently the officers' first shot, the DA trigger stroke, ended up far out of the preferred zone on the target while their successive shots were much closer to the mark. Too many wide shots and the officer would be forced to shoot the course over again.

Another all-too-frequent occurrence was officers becoming frustrated by the long DA stroke. Some of these officers were observed "dumping" the first shot by just yanking the trigger as fast as they could to "get rid of" the first DA shot and move on to the SA trigger pull. I should not have to mention that this practice is both wasteful and potentially dangerous.

**The results of a full 15-shot magazine fired from 15 yards.**

Traditional double-action pistols, also known as DA/SA, have been in service since before World War II and the basic design is nearly a century old. One of the original selling points of this action was that sol-



**The BeamHit laser system proved most valuable for DA trigger practice.**

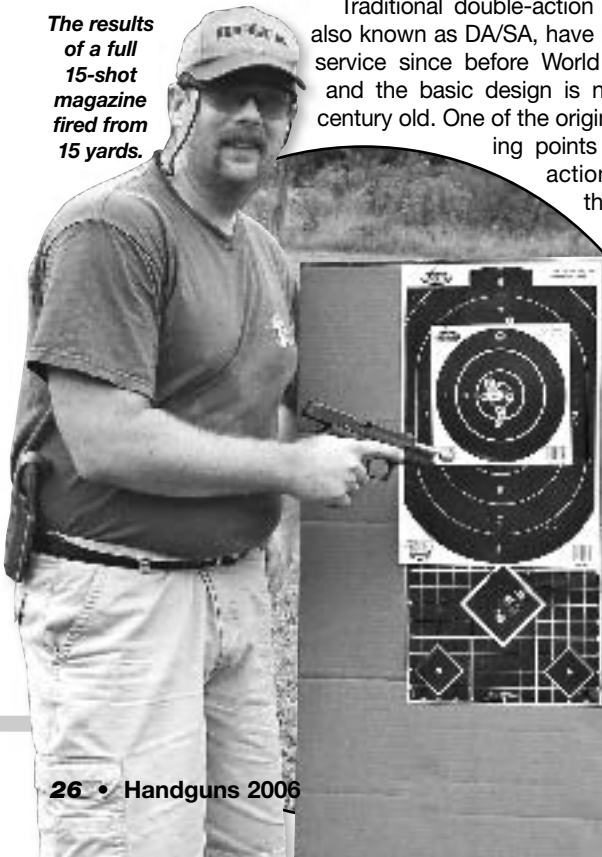
diers could safely carry the pistol with a round chambered, a practice proscribed by the military for single-action pistols. (Yes, I know you can carry a SA pistol safely cocked and locked but that is a topic for another discussion.)

While traditional-style DA/SA pistols are not as popular as they were ten years or so back, there are still thousands of them in service and numerous companies still offer them for sale. There are many styles of double-action-only pistols available now but rather than solving the trigger management dilemma, these ultra-long trigger pulls make the problem worse, not better. Yes, some DAO guns do have smooth manageable triggers, but many more have atrociously long, heavy pulls.

### **Gun Details**

While considering this training issue I received a new ZDA 9mm pistol from Charles Daly of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The ZDA is a familiar looking double-action handgun with a couple of unique features. Many readers may know that Charles Daly has a long-standing relationship with Zastava to manufacture firearms for their line.

The most obvious attribute of this pistol should be the ambidextrous controls. The primary control mechanism is the de-cock/slide stop combination lever. This control performs two jobs and is identical on both the right and left side of the frame. When the slide is forward and the hammer is cocked, the lever is depressed to safely lower the hammer for DA shooting. Pressing up or down on the lever will lock or release the slide for administrative gun handling. The magazine release button also works the





same on either side of the frame.

As mentioned, the ZDA is a traditional design DA/SA pistol. As it is expected that the pistol will be carried with the hammer de-cocked for a DA first shot, no manual safety is found on the gun. The ZDA does have an internal firing pin block that is only released by a complete trigger stroke.

The only control that is not ambidextrous is the take-down lever found on the left side of the frame. Disassembling the pistol is a relatively easy proposition. Remove the magazine, clear and check the chamber, lock the slide to the rear, then ease it forward about 0.8 of an inch. Press down on the lever and ease the slide off of the frame. Including the magazine, there are only five primary parts to clean.

The 4-inch barrel is stainless steel, and the frame and slide are finished in a gun blue. Grips are black polymer. The double stack magazine holds 15 rounds of 9mm ammunition. Each pistol is shipped in a padded hard case.

### **BeamHit Details**

In addition to my normal gun testing chores I wanted to work with a new firearms training tool. The BeamHit laser training system from MPRI allows shooters to make the most of dry-fire practice by combining a laser projection device with a laser sensitive target. The BeamHit laser device is attached to your choice of gun by the use of different caliber barrel rods.

The basic Model 110 BeamHit package comes with a .38/9mm, .40, and .45 caliber barrel rods. Also included with the kit is an electronic target with shot display counter and the user's manual.

I checked the ZDA pistol twice to ensure it was empty and inserted the laser device with the 9mm barrel rod into the muzzle. With the included Allen wrench, I adjusted the red laser dot so that it was just above the front sight.

With the BeamHit laser in place I practiced engaging the electronic target in the DA mode. At first I began with slow, deliberate trigger strokes, placing well-aimed shots on the target. As I became more comfortable, I was able

to go faster and found that after 20 to 30 shots with the BeamHit I was getting comfortable with the long trigger stroke. In the span of only half an hour I put a couple of hundred laser shots on target and devoted my attention to mastering the pistol's DA trigger stroke.

Yes, you can develop a good trigger stroke by dry firing, but you don't get any real feedback from dry firing. With the BeamHit you see immediately whether or not you pressed the trigger properly and kept your sights on target. The BeamHit training can be interesting and enjoyable as well. A short time after I had set the unit up in the family room, both my wife and oldest son were waiting for their turn to try it out.

### **Range Time**

As the Charles Daly ZDA is primarily a defensive pistol, I tested it out with a number of controlled expansion bullets from Black Hills, CorBon, Federal, and Hornady. I also had on hand a 147-grain Match full metal jacket load from CorBon.

With my chronographing and accuracy tests completed, I wanted to test out the DA trigger pull and see how well I was able to manage it. What I discovered was that the transition from DA to SA was easily manageable and that accurate shot placement was not at all difficult. My impression of the trigger function was that it was pretty darn good for a factory gun.

In order to get a serious workout with the ZDA I put on

**Charles Daly ZDA has ambidextrous controls. Accessories included Gould & Goodrich holster, SIG knife, and Streamlight compact flashlight.**

## Charles Daly ZDA 9mm

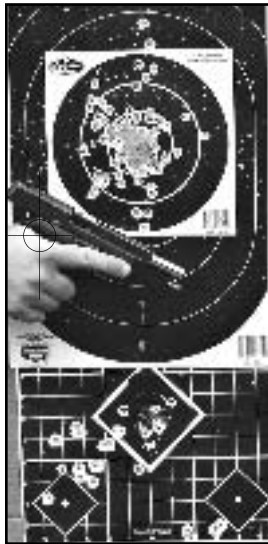


### Specifications Charles Daly ZDA

**Caliber:** 9mm  
**Barrel:** 4 inches  
**OA Length:** 7.75 inches  
**Weight:** 32 ounces  
**Grips:** Black polymer  
**Sights:** 3-dot drift adjustable  
**Action:** DA/SA  
**Features:** Ambidextrous controls  
**Finish:** Matte blue  
**Capacity:** 15-shot mag

▲ *The G&G Gold Line paddle holster held the ZDA pistol for concealed carry.*

▼ *From contact range out to 20 yards, the ZDA pistol chewed the center out of the target.*



around that. The use of the BeamHit system simply makes practice more convenient and is much more productive than merely dry firing the gun.

I was most impressed by not only the respectable accuracy of the ZDA but by the reliability of the gun as well. After all, accuracy does not count for much if the gun cannot get through a magazine without jamming or failing in some way. Though right-handed shooters may not get excited about the pistol's ambidextrous controls, the southpaws in the audience should appreciate them.

The ZDA pistol proved a solid performer, equal to guns with much larger price tags. For a shooter who is looking for an affordable 9mm pistol and is willing to learn the DA trigger stroke, the ZDA pistol is quite a find.

a Gould & Goodrich paddle holster and practiced gun presentation drills. I worked against targets from contact range out to 20 yards. More than one hundred rounds into my testing, I had literally chewed the center out of the cardboard target backing.

### Wrap Up

By the time I sat down to pen this review I had fired from 250 to 300 rounds through the Charles Daly pistol. Not one failure or stoppage occurred during that time with any of the different loads. I suppose the ZDA pistol could accurately be described as a full-sized pistol. While not as large as a Beretta 92 or GLOCK 17, the ZDA is big enough to wrap your hands around and the 9mm recoil is very controllable.

As far as mastering the DA trigger stroke, the shooter needs to practice; there really is no way

### For more information contact

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#### Gould & Goodrich

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 Lillington, NC 27546  
 910-893-2071  
[www.gouldusa.com](http://www.gouldusa.com)

#### MPRI BeamHit

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 Columbia, MD 21046  
 800-232-6448  
[www.beamhit.com](http://www.beamhit.com)

### Performance Charles Daly ZDA 9mm

Load	Velocity	Accuracy
<b>Black Hills 115 JHP EXP</b>	1105	2.75
<b>Black Hills 124 JHP +P</b>	1113	2.50
<b>CorBon 115 DPX +P</b>	1198	3.00
<b>CorBon 125 JHP +P</b>	1179	2.75
<b>CorBon 147 Match FMJ</b>	987	1.75
<b>Federal 124 Hydra-Shok</b>	1091	2.50
<b>Hornady 124 XTP</b>	1074	2.63

Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second (fps) by Chrony F1 chronograph, accuracy in inches for best groups from 20 yards.