

BY CHRIS CERINO

POLYMER PALOOZA

THE PLASTIC ROUNDUP



■ The author and many other professionals in the firearms world gathered at Fireline Shooting and Training Center in Appleton, Wisconsin, to put the Walther Creed and a range of other polymer products through their paces.



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CHOICE**

Shooting for speed and accuracy, the competitors had a pair of 15-round magazines to drop 24 polymer plates from Newbold Targets.

It seems that polymers have all but taken over the gun world these days. Almost everything you can think of in the firearms industry has a polymer counterpart somewhere — guns have polymer frames, sights, triggers, magazines and more. And it's not just firearms; accessories, training tools and safety gear are more and more commonly found in non-ferrous form as well. Polymer is prolific all around us.

Most would define “polymer” simply as plastic. Hard or soft, we use polymer and plastic synonymously every day. Personal experience and knowledge lead me to believe and do the same. Plastic or rubber, not wood or steel ... right? I had enough doubt to feel that a little legwork on the true definition of the word “polymer” was necessary.

“Polymer” comes from the Greek *polymerés*, which means “having many parts.” Yikes! That doesn't scream “plastic” to me. Finally, I found a scientific website that

opened by talking about polymers or plastics as one and the same. OK then ... polymer is plastic. 'Nuff said!

With the prolific polymer presence in the market, the USCCA announced it would hold the first-ever Polymer Palooza. *Concealed Carry Magazine* Executive Editor Kevin Michalowski was the man behind the event, and he contacted a variety of manufacturers of polymer products on the market. He covered all the bases: guns, gear, targets, protective gear and even ammunition.

Invitations found a select few and arrived with minimal information. Keeping it mysterious and simple, Michalowski stated that it was to be the first-ever Polymer Palooza and there would be “some friendly competition.” (Of course, bragging rights would go to the winner and there would be writing opportunities for all.) No one really knew what to expect.

Not too far from the USCCA

headquarters, we all gathered at the Fireline Range in Appleton, Wisconsin. A franchise-able chain of combination gun store /indoor firing range, Fireline is state of the art. Owner Brandon Powers greeted us and gave a quick tour of the well-stocked facility before we headed into one of its several classrooms. Michalowski took the floor, introduced all the attendees and gave us a rundown of what the day held for us.

We'd be running Walther Firearms' latest offering and shooting an array of reactive and indoor-range-friendly polymer targets. Safety gear, loading aids, shooting gear and, yes, even polymer-coated ammunition was also provided, and some manufacturer representatives were on hand to explain their wares.

THE ROUNDUP

Walther Firearms supplied their new Creed pistol in 9mm. Walther's Creed is a polymer hybrid, as many new guns released today are. It has

a full-sized steel slide and a full-sized polymer frame to match. Its size lends itself to training use or plinking. It was very shootable, and it felt good in my hands.

Though not the most attractive gun and certainly lacking sex appeal in my eyes, it makes up for its shortcomings in the looks department with a balanced feel and a truly great trigger. Touted as a “double-action-only” pistol, the Creed does have an exposed hammer that is, for the most part, unnoticeable; the actual hammer itself is bobbed and almost completely shrouded by the slide. You can’t tell it’s there until you actually press the trigger, and you won’t notice it live-firing. What you do notice is that, at 6.5 pounds, the travel of that double-action is as smooth as butter, with no stacking or gravelly feel. The DXT Big Dots, supplied by XS Sights out of Texas, were easy to see and fast to pick up.

Despite an appearance of being top-heavy, I did not find the Creed to be so. None of the shooters had difficulty shooting the gun quickly and accurately. The Creed is ergonomically friendly with controls in all the right locations, and, with an MSRP of \$399, it doesn’t break the bank. Watching everyone shoot the pistol well leads me to believe that it could be that “one gun” in your collection you could take to the range with anyone and have a successful day.

TARGET ACQUIRED

Newbold Targets, of Middlesex, New Jersey, supplied targets for the event. Significantly more fun than traditional paper units, Newbold has a solution for when targets are to be shot with rifles, pistols or shotguns at distances that would be unsafe with steel.

I could do an entire article on the features, benefits and advantages of Newbold’s polymer targets. Not only are they of polymer construction, the bases and mounting hardware are also made of the same durable, resilient material. If you’ve shot traditional steel-plate racks,

you understand the problems with maintenance and ricochets from rounds hitting the racks and the hardware.

These self-sealing, reactive polymer targets are also safe to use indoors. Newbold’s polymer construction alleviates concerns of ricochets and backsplash and therefore concerns about collateral damage to ceilings and walls. Being able to shoot reactive targets on an indoor range is a great feature, and couple that with not requiring the minimum standoff distance of steel (usually 30 feet for pistols and 100 yards for rifles) and it allows for incredible versatility. Safe, light and reusable, polymer targets really increase your options.

We also got a sneak preview of their new line of dummy rounds. Made with the same tough yet flexible polymer inserted into your favorite caliber case, these inert rounds have another desirable feature: For dry-fire use, enough material protrudes from the primer pocket to protect firing pins.

GUNLEATHER

Comp-Tac Holsters out of Houston, Texas, supplied holsters, magazine carriers and their latest gun belt for our use. Comp-Tac impressed me with their quality construction and fit; no surprise that a little research revealed them to have been voted the most popular holster at the IDPA Nationals from 2011 to 2016.

On the firing line, we had their International Holster and double magazine carrier. The mag pouch was a belt-slide-style but incorporated a curved mounting surface, which aided in fit and comfort by drawing the entire unit closer to the shooter rather than creating tension with squared-off surfaces on the body side.

The holster itself ships with mounting options for belt-slide or paddle as well as an optional drop and offset. When I teach defensive pistol classes, I use the standard-ride belt-slide holster; the drop and offset additions are bet-

ter suited to competitive shooting. It’s easy to recommend this holster to anyone interested in training and competing and who doesn’t want to shell out a bundle buying gear.

Finding a solid gun belt that’s comfortable isn’t easy. Comp-Tac’s Kydex Reinforced Contour Belt (\$84.99 MSRP) is *absolutely* a heavy-duty gun belt with a look that doesn’t give away your passion for firearms. Despite the out-of-the-package comfort, it’s designed to support the extra weight of a gun and magazines. The break-in period generally found with stiff gun belts is eliminated by design, as the polymer insert delivers the required rigidity without the potential discomfort of steel.

Strength and shape are created by sandwiching Kydex between high-quality Texas steerhide, but that’s not all. If you’re wondering what the “contour” is about, look at any belt you wear often and you’ll see that it isn’t straight when you take it off; it will have swail, or a belly-like bend, in the center where it runs through your back belt loop. Comp-Tac built that contour into this belt and it’s extremely noticeable the first time you put it on.

SHARP FOCUS

When it comes to protective eyewear (for lack of a better pun), the USCCA’s Polymer Palooza really cleared things up for me. SSP Eyewear of Moses Lake, Washington, provided protective eyewear for the event. Having spoken to a representative of the company as well as a current user and proponent of these glasses, my interest was piqued to try them.

Safety eyewear made of unbreakable polycarbonate with strategically located magnification is more than just advancement in the modern market; it’s the kind of thing that can literally change shooting for millions. If you’re like me and are getting to the point where reading glasses are mandatory, SSP Eyewear is worth a look. Actually, with pricing so reasonable — \$69 for their Premier Kit — it would be fool-

ish not to try these glasses. Besides providing clear, yellow and smoked lenses, the kit includes the same lenses with bifocal and top-focal as well as no magnification. With all these options, you can customize your safety glasses to clear up your sights while keeping distance in focus.

During the shoot, I gave these glasses a fair shake. I set up with a 1.25 magnification on the top of my dominant eye and a 1.25 bifocal on my non-dominant eye. There was a slight learning curve to get my head down just enough to see the sights through the top-focal lens, but the sights and target both remained clear.

WHAT'S THAT YOU SAY?

Walker's Game Ears out of Grand Prairie, Texas, offered two types of hearing protection: Both were electronic, but one was in-ear and the other more traditional "can"-style earmuffs. I chose over-the-ear protection (\$69.99 MSRP) since my wife already has the Walker's Silencer in-ear electronics (\$229.95 MSRP) and I wanted to work with something I'd never used before.

At an indoor range, it's not unusual to have to wear "double ears," which means wearing both plugs and over-ear protection. The great thing about using electronics for your over-ear protection is that you still have great hearing ability despite having inner ear plugs, as the hearing magnification gives you the ability to hear directions while still offering the "double ear" protection.

LET'S GET SHOOTING

Keeping the Creed's 16-round magazines loaded and ready for everyone would have been a thumb-breaking experience had it not been for another polymer invention. Elite Tactical Systems, of Knoxville, Tennessee, supported the event with their handy C.A.M Magazine Loader (\$29.99), which works much like a stripper clip works for military rifle magazines.

To use the loader, first — and I kept forgetting — seat your mag-

azine into the unit. Then use the included rail to pick up 10 rounds out of your factory ammo box. The supplied plunger is used to press the rounds into the magazine. Repeat as necessary until the magazine is filled.

Federal, in the form of its new American Eagle Syntech line of ammunition, kept everyone shooting for the day. The polymer coating on these new projectiles is intended to prevent harsh metal-on-metal contact between the bullet and bore, thereby eliminating copper and lead fouling.

This is combined with clean-burning powders and a lead-free primer. Federal states that this new polymer-coated bullet, primer and powder combination will keep your gun cleaner longer, so you can shoot more — and shoot better.

The only thing that I found irksome about the new ammo was the red polymer-coated bullets. When I first approached the loading table, I thought we were practicing using the C.A.M. loaders with dummy rounds.

I could see these ending up mixed in with the dummy rounds at a training academy if utmost care were not taken, but the ammunition did work flawlessly all day and the guns were remarkably clean upon inspection at the close of the event.

An internet search of popular ammunition sites found American Eagle Syntech selling for around \$14 for a box of 50. This is a little more than other practice ammunition, but, if you have to shoot at a range that requires lead-free primers, it is a reasonably priced option.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The event itself was tremendous fun for all involved. Michalowski started off with simple criteria: Each of us would shoot an array of 24 Newbold targets on a timer, from the holster, as fast as we could. But regular old two-handed shooting wasn't enough for this competitive group of showboating writers and

shooters.

Movement across the range was added from left to right. It snowballed from there as this "simple" challenge added more criteria each time. Keeping the movement and speed of completed time, shooters also competed in strong-hand-only, weak-hand-only, and then there had to be two-handed, weak-side as well. None of it was particularly difficult, but everyone tried to go fast and the smack talk was full-on. I wish I could say I had something to brag about when it was all over, but I really don't. We all shot well, but only one was the best.

There was learning, camaraderie, gear vetting and fun. The USCCA's Polymer Palooza was a success and opened a lot of eyes to new polymer technology. I'd always recognized polymer's presence in the firearms industry as it pertains to firearms themselves, but until Polymer Palooza, I hadn't really considered polymer's presence across the entire industry. Plastic might be comparatively new to the scene, but it's here to stay and in more ways than one.

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