

Helluva Hellcat

**SPRINGFIELD'S
EDC MICRO**
CHANGES IT STRIPES,
AND WE PUT IT
THROUGH ITS PACES

— By Richard Johnson —



Language changes to reflect the culture. Whereas a spiteful woman may have been derided as a hellcat in decades past, the term is transformed in modern society to mean power and performance. Just as Dodge embraced the term for its tire-smoking 717-horsepower Challenger, so has Springfield Armory for its own supercharged micro-pistol.

Few people would dare go up against a driver behind the wheel of a Hellcat. Likewise, few would knowingly challenge anyone carrying a Hellcat. In both cases, the competition is likely to get smoked.

I wanted to see what the new Springfield pistol was all about. I picked up a Hellcat OSP with the FDE finish. To make it the complete high-performance package, I tested it with the new Swampfox Sentinel red-dot sight and the Covert OWB holster from Crucial Concealment. I have to say this gun is the real deal.

PETTING THE CAT

Springfield Armory bills the Hellcat as “the world’s highest capacity micro-compact.” Flush-fitting magazines pack in 11 rounds of 9mm ammunition, edging out the nearest competitor with a 10-percent capacity increase. Even more interesting is the firepower-to-size ratio when compared to similarly sized single-stack pistols.

Consider the comparably sized Smith & Wesson Shield loads seven rounds into a flush-fitting mag, while the Glock 43 only manages six. While the Hellcat magazines are wider than single-stack feeders, the gun’s external width isn’t much—if any—thicker. Perhaps Springfield Armory discovered a way to borrow dimensionally transcendental technology from Dr. Who’s TARDIS—think, bigger on the inside.

Regardless of the pseudo-physics explanations for magazine capacity, the pistol remains thin. Officially, the grip is only 1 inch wide. The slide is even thinner: only 0.85 inches by my mea-



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surement. Though those measurements sound like they belong to a single-stack pistol, the Hellcat presents a relatively wide backstrap to the hand. It fills the hand for, in my opinion, an improved feel. If you suspect this would take some of the bite out of the gun’s recoil, multiple trips to the range proved it to be true.

WINNING THE FIGHT

Having extra rounds on tap is similar to having a wealth of ponies under the hood: It sounds good but matters little if you can’t use them. For a sports car, you have to get the car to hook and launch to use those horses. Along the same lines, Springfield Armory knows ammo is wasted if it isn’t on target. As a result, the Hellcat was designed with winning gunfights in mind.

Micro-compact guns often suffer from miniature sights that are too small to see under stress. Some of them have slick grips that can wiggle around in your hands. Still others have tiny, inaccessible controls.

Not the Hellcat. This gun is intended to win defensive lethal-force encounters.

In contrast to many of the other micro-compact handguns, the Hellcat is fitted with true combat sights, an adaptive grip texture and usable controls. Further, the pistols have accessory rails compatible with many light and laser units on the market. The OSP versions of the Hellcat are fitted with a factory slide cut for a red-dot sight.

In combat, the human body kicks into an alarm response that alters your vision, strength and other characteristics to help you fight or escape danger. In these circumstances, standard pistol sights can be hard to use. I’ve found that a brightly colored, large front sight combined with training creates the most likely circumstance where you will see the front sight under stress.

Springfield Armory uses a full-sized front sight that combines a tritium vial with a prominent photoluminescent ring. This combination provides a bright aiming point across a broad spectrum of ambient light levels. Plus, the yellow-green color contrasts well against many different targets.

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SPEC BOX

SPRINGFIELD HELLCAT OSP

CALIBER:	9mm
BARREL:	3 inches
OA LENGTH:	6.0 inches
WEIGHT:	17.9 oz
GRIPS:	Integral polymer
SIGHTS:	Tritium front, U-notch rear
ACTION:	Striker-fired
FINISH:	FDE
CAPACITY:	11+1, 13+1
MSRP:	\$643

For a rear sight, the Hellcat has a wide and deep U-notch with a simple wide backstrap to the hand. It fills the hand for, in my opinion, an improved feel. If you suspect this would take some of the bite out of the gun’s recoil, multiple trips to the range proved it to be true.

the hard edge allows you to manipulate the slide with only one hand.

RANGE TIME

Eager to hit the range with the pistol, I took the Hellcat out for a few hours of getting acquainted time. I was pleased at how the gun felt very natural in my hand. It did not feel like a typical micro-compact. During recoil, it locked into my hand and the muzzle rise seemed less than some .380 pistols.

The undercut triggerguard allowed me to get a high grip on the pistol, while the pinky extension on the flush-fitting magazine gave me a full hold. Combined with the wide backstrap and adaptive grip texture, the Hellcat spit fire but was tame in my hands.

The factory sights were fantastic to use: quick to find and fast to align. They got shots on target as quickly as any full-size handgun. Likewise, magazine changes were swift. A slight bevel to

HELLOVA HELLCAT

the magazine well guided them home nearly as easily as I could swap mags on a duty pistol.

Even though the pistol ran hard and fast in factory trim, I wanted to see what it could do with a red-dot sight. Enter the Sentinel.

SWAMPFOX SENTINEL

No matter how good the sights are, a red-dot sight offers benefits that include the ability to focus on the threat instead of the front sight post for accurate shots. We've seen what a revolution reflex sights have had in the rifle market. I believe we are now seeing the same kind of shift for handguns.

Ready for the pistol optics pivot, Springfield Armory cuts the OSP slides to fit RMSc-sized optics. There are a small but growing number of reflex sights that use the RMSc footprint. Possibly the best one at the time of this writing is the Swampfox Sentinel.

The Sentinel matches the Hellcat perfectly. Both are duty-grade and built for a lifetime of use. Housed in a CNC-machined 7075-T6 body, the waterproof sight uses a multi-coated glass lens that resists water, fogging and scratching. Call me old-fashioned, but I prefer the rugged aluminum and clarity of glass offered by the Sentinel as compared to other optics that use polymer for the bodies and lenses.

Swampfox offers two versions of the Sentinel: one is a manually adjustable sight, while the second is a constant-on sight that automatically adjusts brightness based on ambient light. I tested the automatic version of the sight and was impressed right out of the box. It seemed as durable as the specs suggested yet was impressively lightweight at about 0.6 ounces.

The Sentinel mounts directly to the slide without the need for an adaptor plate. It is low-profile enough that you can still use the factory sights should the optic ever fail.



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PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
Liberty Civil Defense 50 JHP +P	1,863	1.92
Sig Sauer V-Crown 147 JHP	962	1.58
Speer Gold Dot 124 JHP	1,053	2.02

Bullets measured in grains, velocity in fps by chronograph and accuracy in inches for best five-shot groups at 7 yards off-hand.

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I made a second trip to the range as soon as I installed the Sentinel. I was not disappointed. To start with, the Sentinel performed exactly the way it was advertised. The dot was always on and adjusted near-instantaneously to the changing ambient light. It was never so bright that it created visual artifacts, and it was always bright enough to clearly see on the target.

Dialing in the sight was straightforward. Once I had it where I wanted, it did not shift it through 500 rounds of fire.

I find that I am a more precise shooter when using the Hellcat's iron sights. However, I am not training with the Hellcat for a shooting competition. This gun is intended for more serious work, and with the Sentinel in place, I get fast and consistent shot placement on the target. When getting fast hits counts, the Hellcat with a Sentinel red-dot sight gets the job done.

CONCEALED CARRY

Now that I had an idea of how the gun would handle, I spent some time carry-

ing the pistol in a Crucial Concealment Covert OWB rig. The company molds the Kydex shell with a curve to hug the side of your body. Then, the company mates it with flexible polymer belt loops that allow your belt to really snug it into your side for maximum concealability. The result is an outside-the-waistband (OWB) rig that conceals more like an inside-the-waistband (IWB) holster.

Two screws hold each belt loop in place. If you remove the screws, you can adjust the holster for a forward, rear or neutral cant. Additionally, you can adjust the ride height if you select the straight-up draw. A screw forward of the triggerguard adjusts the friction retention of the holster.

I prefer to carry IWB for the concealment qualities. However, I found the Crucial Concealment Covert offered the same level of concealment but with an increased comfort level.

Further, retention was spot on as delivered. The Hellcat locked into place and offered enough resistance that it would not fall out even when I turned it upside down and shook it vigorously. This was my first experience with Crucial Concealment's work, and it will not be my last.

THE FINISH LINE

The high-performance Hellcat makes for a great defensive pistol. It offers a lot of firepower in a small, but controllable, package. Its use of real combat sights enhances its purpose, while the option

for adding a red-dot sight will make a lot of people happy.

Is it the best defensive pistol on the market today? That's for you to decide. As with any personal protection pistol, you need to spend some time with it to see if it will work for you. As for mine, I happily purchased this gun and added it to my stable of working guns.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY
springfield-armory.com

SWAMPFOX OPTICS
swampfoptics.com

CRUCIAL CONCEALMENT
crucialconcealment.com