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Lenn: You belong to a select group. I don't usually send pre-publication MS copies. These are for Gun Week and American Handgunner. I will also be doing it for Harris (probably, Combat Handguns).

Call me when you get a chance — I have some free R & D comments (anytime after 10:00 AM Central Time).

*Jay*

31 August 2010

"I find it a good sign when a case is obscure. If a thing is clear as daylight — *eh bien*, mistrust it! Someone has made it so."

— Hercule Poirot

(Agatha Christie)

COPY

For: GWWK

The P.S.A. .25 Auto

By: J. B. Wood

Thanks to Lenn Kristal and Precision Small Arms, the FN/Browning "Baby" is back! In its original versions, this neat little .25 Auto pistol had quite a history. Designed by Dieudonne Saive at the Fabrique Nationale in Belgium, it was made by FN from 1931 to 1979. Then, for a short time (until 1983), it was made for FN by the MAB firm in France.

After the Manufacture d'Armes de Bayonne ended its operations, the FN people called on a Canadian company, Precision Small Parts, to produce the "Baby" for them. This was mostly done in the U.S., at a PSP subsidiary in Charlottesville, Virginia, from 1985 to 1990. They had U.S. export difficulties, and subsequently sold part of the production to Kassnar (KBI) of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Previously, in 1968, a ridiculous U.S. law banned the importation of all neat and small handguns. In this era, from 1972 to 1984, the Bauer company of Fraser, Michigan produced a stainless-steel version of the "Baby" that was slightly altered internally to avoid a patent dust-up with the FN people. When the Bauer firm went out-of-business, the factory that had made it for them offered it for a while as the "Fraser".

All of this brings us to 2008, and the founding of Precision Small Arms (P.S.A.) in Aspen, Colorado. They had a lot of the original parts and tooling from the PSP company, and applied some state-of-the-art methods — CNC machining and dimensional control technology. They did it perfectly, and the "Baby" was re-born. I was the first writer to examine and shoot one, in August, 2010.

My sample is the deluxe "Featherweight" version. It has a frame of 7075 forged aluminum, with all of the other mechanical components in high-grade steel. A gold-finished trigger adds to the elegant appearance. All of this is quite attractive, and production care is obvious. Even so, the pistol has to compete with its container.

Mad by Technoframes of Italy, the brush-finish aluminum case is numbered to match the pistol. A magnetic latch and a key-lock secure the lid. At each bottom corner, there are soft-polymer pads. Inside, the pistol is centered in a top-tray, nicely recessed. The tray also has protective feet, and a bumper-strip surrounds it. No rattling. It lifts out easily.

In the lower level there are form-cut recesses for two magazines, the key to the case, a bore brush, and twelve cartridges. Looking at this container brings to mind names like Rolex and Rolls Royce. And, yes, this particular version of the pistol does edge into the luxury class. The suggested retail price goes a little past \$900. For the pistol and the case, you pay for high quality.

Most readers will know the mechanical features of the original "Baby", but just in case: The P.S.A. .25, which is essentially identical, is striker-fired and single action. An indicator emerges at the rear of the slide when the striker is in cocked position. The operating button of the manual safety is at the front of the left grip, within easy thumb-reach. The safety blocks the sear.

When the magazine is removed, there is an automatic internal safety that also blocks the sear. Alas, just as in Dieudonne Saive's original design, removal of this little innovation requires the making of a different magazine catch spring. On an FN version that I used to carry, I did this. You are advised to leave it alone.

For those who want the numbers, the P.S.A. .25 is 4.11 inches in length, 2.88 inches in height. Width is 0.875 of an inch, and that's through the grips, so it's actually slimmer. Barrel length is 2.13 inches. Weight is 7.25 ounces with the aluminum frame, and 9.70 ounces in steel. Magazine capacity is six rounds.

With the small size, tiny sights, and room for only one finger on the frame, any serious target work would be useless. I used a two-hand hold at seven yards, and the P.S.A. .25 kept all rounds in the 8-inch black of a Champion target. One five-shot group measured just over four inches. The ammo was Czech, Sellier & Bellot, the regular full-jacket load. No malfunctions.

In addition to the deluxe version that I tested, there are regular hot-blued all-steel pistols. At this point, I don't have the suggested retail figure for those, but I'm sure it will be significantly less. For more information: Precision Small Arms, Inc., P.O. Box 931, Aspen, CO 81612. Phone: 970-390-5520. Internet: [www.precisionsmallarms.com](http://www.precisionsmallarms.com).

- JBW -

The P.S.A. .25 Auto

By: J. B. Wood

Photos

- 1 The P.S.A. "Baby" in the palm of an average hand.
- 2 The P.S.A. .25 and its original ancestor, the FN/Browning.
- 3 The P.S.A. .25 and two of its ancestors, the PSP/Kassnar,  
and the FN/Browning.
- 4 & 5 The P.S.A. .25, left & right sides.
- 6 The P.S.A. .25, field-stripped.
- 7, 8 & The magnificent container, itself a work of art.
- 10 The manual safety is shown here in off-safe position.

Pre-Publication  
**COPY**  
For: AH

The P.S.A. .25 Auto

By: J. B. Wood

(The Browning "Baby" returns!)

Here at the start, a little history: In 1927, just a year after the death of John Moses Browning, the design department at Fabrique Nationale in Belgium decided that something smaller and neater was needed to replace their original .25 Auto pistol. They wisely assigned the project to Dieudonne Saive, and the result was the FN/Browning "Baby".

It was, indeed, smaller, flatter, and more concealable. And, it did away with some of the unwanted features of the earlier pistol, such as the grip safety. The "Baby" was made at FN from 1931 to 1979, and then briefly (1979-1983) by MAB in Bayonne, France. Total production was around a half-million pistols.

During World War Two, the "Baby" was a favorite of the gallant Resistance in Nazi-occupied France. Much later, in Vietnam, I've been told it was a standard-issue kit item for pilots. Otherwise, along the way, its small size and total reliability made it popular as a deep-cover personal carry piece. While the .25 Auto cartridge is definitely not a major-power round, it has settled matters, many times.

After the MAB firm went out of business, FN contracted with Precision Small Parts in Canada, and their subsidiary in Charlottesville, Virginia, to produce the pistol. They subsequently ran into U.S. export problems. Between 1985 and 1990, a small number of this production was sold to KBI of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Then, PSP closed its doors.

After the infamous U.S. law of 1968 banned importation of handguns of this size, the Bauer company of Fraser, Michigan marketed a stainless-steel version of the pistol from 1972 to 1984. To avoid patent hassles, there were a few internal mechanical differences. Still, it was, essentially, the "Baby". After the Bauer firm dissolved, the actual maker, the factory, continued to offer it for a few years as the "Fraser". End of history lesson.

Not long after the PSP firm ceased operations, their assets were purchased by Lenn Kristal and a group of investor . They didn't rush into production. Several years went by as they studied the design, adding a few subtle refinements. Finally, in 2008, they founded Precision Small Arms in Aspen, Colorado, and the "Baby" was back in production.

I'm pleased to be the first writer to actually try out the new P.S.A. .25 Auto, and I'm also pleased to report that they have cut no corners here. Through the magic of CNC machining and dimensional control inspection technology, everything is exactly right. The over-all effect can only be described as "elegant". And, with all this, the pistol is almost upstaged by its container.

The brushed-finish aluminum case is by Technoframes of Italy, and is a work of art. Little soft-polymer feet at each corner prevent marring of your antique desk. The lid has both magnetic and key latches. When opened, there is the pistol at center, in a soft-lined form-cut recess. Now, lift out the top tray. It also has non-marring feet, and a surrounding bumper-strip to prevent any rattling.

Below, all items neatly recessed, are spaces for two magazines, a bore brush, the case key, and 12 cartridge-storing holes. My sample pistol is the "Featherweight" version, with a frame of 7075 forged aluminum. I will note here that other versions are available, including original hot-blue finish, and presumably those will cost somewhat less. On this one, the gold trigger is a nice touch.



Comparing the P.S.A. .25 directly with my original FN/Browning "Baby", they're exactly the same. For those who like to have the numbers, the length is 4.11 inches, height 2.88 inches, and barrel length is 2.13 inches. The aluminum-frame version weighs 7.25 ounces, and the steel-frame is 9.70 ounces. Magazine capacity is six rounds.

In case some reader may have joined us late, and is not familiar with the original "Baby", some mechanical details: The P.S.A. .25 is single action, striker-fired. When the striker is cocked, a small indicator emerges at the rear of the slide. The manual safety directly blocks the sear, and its operating button is conveniently located at the front of the left grip panel.

As on the original FN pistol, there is an automatic internal magazine-disconnect safety. When the magazine is out, the sear is securely blocked, and it can't fire. On any gun that I mean to carry, I routinely remove these items. However, in this design, it's necessary to then make a separate and different magazine catch spring. Best advice: Don't mess with it.

With small pistols of this type, there is room on the front-strap of the frame for only one finger of an average hand, and the sights are very small. I have always thought that any formal, rested target work would be ridiculous. At a distance of seven yards, with a two-hand hold, will it keep all hits in the 8-inch black of a Champion VisiShot target? In this case, yes. I was using the regular 50-grain load from Sellier & Bellot, and functioning was perfect.

The beautiful light-weight version shown here, in its impressive container, is in the luxury class. Suggested retail price is in the \$900-plus category. The regular blued version, as noted earlier, costs less. The P.S.A. .25 Auto is a marvelous re-creation of the FN/Browning "Baby". As always, high quality costs a little more.

- JBW -

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The P.S.A. .25 Auto

By: J. B. Wood

Photo: (by frame number)

- 2 Back through history: Top - original FN/Browning "Baby".  
Next - Bauer. Third - PSP. Last - P.S.A. Featherweight.
- 3 Same, different format. From left - P.S.A., PSP, Bauer,  
FN/Browning "Baby".
- 4 & 5 The P.S.A. .25 Auto, left & right sides.
- 6, 7 & 8 The elegant P.S.A. container.
- 9 The manual safety is shown here in on-safe position.
- 11 The P.S.A. .25 Auto, field-stripped.
- 12 & 13 P.S.A. .25, both sides, different format.
- 16 When the striker is cocked, an indicator pin emerges  
at the rear of the slide.
- 17 A good carry combination — the P.S.A. .25 and the  
Tuf'-Writer tactical pen.
- 19 The P.S.A. .25 in an average hand.