

SIG'S NEW 226



BLACKWATER TACTICAL 9MM

PAT CASCIO
PHOTOS: JOSEPH R. NOVELOZO

It's not often I get a brand new to the market firearm for T&E for an article. Somehow, I lucked out, with a little help from Laura Burgess, who handles the PR/Marketing for SIG SAUER (and other gun companies too). The gun I reviewed for this article is the same exact gun you'll see on the SIG Web site and in their new 2009 catalog.

Name Change

As this article is being written, February 2009, Blackwater USA, which changed their name to Blackwater Worldwide, just went through another name change. They will now be known as "Xe" which is simply pronounced "zee." Since the pistol has Blackwater stamped on the gun, I'm gonna call it the Blackwater SIG.

There are a number of worthy features on the Blackwater Tactical 9mm setting it apart from the standard SIG SAUER 226. For one, this gun comes with night sights — the rear are standard 2-dot green. The front sight is a bit different, though. It has a Tru-Glo green fiber optic front sight. It stands out under bright skies, and it's also tritium activated for low light shooting, thus producing the familiar 3-dot green glowing configuration we are used to seeing in night sights; neat idea if you ask me.

The slide is stamped "Blackwater USA" on the right side, and the usual SIG markings on the left. The slide is stainless steel, Nitron coated (a dull gray/black color). On top of the slide is the Blackwater bear paw logo. The front of the slide also has grasping grooves — standard SIGs don't have this feature — I like it! Of course, the rear of the slide has grasping grooves as well. As with the standard 226, this gun comes with a 4.40" barrel.

Working our way down to the aluminum alloy frame, we find the accessory rail for laser sights and/or flashlights. This is standard equipment on the current 226 pistols. What I really like is the extended beavertail grip tang on the back of the frame. Just seems to make the gun sit better in the hand and it helps abate recoil. I'd like to see this on all full-sized SIG pistols.

The usual squared trigger guard can be found, along with checkering on the front of it, the standard 226 models have serrations. The





SIG SAUER P226

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front of the grip strap also has 30-LPI checkering. I like it better than the standard (horizontally) serrated front strap. Although, given my druthers, I'd rather see 25 LPI checkering. The trigger on the Blackwater Tactical is the Short Reset version, which I like, a lot! Makes for an easier reach for my average-sized hands compared to the standard trigger on the other SIG pistols.

How Many Rounds?

Did I mention the Blackwater USA Tactical 226 holds 20 rounds in the magazine? Well, believe it or not, it does. The frame is no longer than normal, however special Blackwater polymer "funnel grips" are installed instead of the regular SIG grips, and they extend past the bottom of the frame. These funnel grips tend to "funnel" a mag into the mag well for fast reloads. These special grips are also marked with the bear paw logo on both sides.

Each Blackwater Tactical 9mm will come with four, 20 round mags made by Mec-Gar. What Mec-Gar and SIG have combined to do is, take the new Mec-Gar 18-rd SIG 226 mags, and add a Plus-2 floor plate on it. I found the mags easy to load, which surprised me. When it's all said and done, the mag extends less than 3/4" below the frame of the gun.

Make no mistake, this gun, with its improvements, isn't designed primarily for concealed carry — although I'm sure, with the right holster and covering garment, it can be concealed. BLACKHAWK! Products sent me a number of holsters to use with this gun. One is their Kydex belt holster designed for concealed carry. The gun and holster combo worked fine for me. Then again, I'm a big boy and I wear loose fitting clothing to conceal my handguns. BLACKHAWK! also sent me one of their tactical thigh rigs, which is perfect for tactical use. It's my favorite tactical thigh rig design bar none!

SIG Reliability

SIG firearms are known for their reliability, accuracy and ruggedness. Still, I wanted to put this Blackwater Tactical 9mm through its paces just the same. I requested a case of mixed 9mm fodder from ol' bud, Jeff Hoffman, who runs Black Hills Ammunition, and a case of various 9mm fodder from the nice folks at Winchester. In all, I ran over 1,200 rounds through this sample without a failure to feed, extract or eject. The gun was not cleaned throughout the testing, either. I gave the gun the once over when I received it, and a good dose of Break-Free lube, and just went from there.

I used a (pre-owned) standard SIG P229, 9mm as a comparison in this test. As mentioned, SIG firearms are known for their accuracy, and the Blackwater gun didn't let me down. Shooting my older 226 alongside the new Blackwater Tactical showed very little in the way of accuracy differences. It would be six of one, and half a dozen of another when it came down to which gun was more accurate — both are winners! However, I did find I could shoot the Blackwater Tactical faster — much faster than my standard



226. It has to be the beaver tail. Both guns, when fed the right ammo, would easily group under 1 1/2" at 25 yards when I did my part.

Functional Accuracy

It was a real toss-up when it came to ammo preferences. I'd be hard pressed to pick between the Black Hills 124-gr JHP fodder or the new Winchester Supreme Elite Bonded 124-gr JHP +P fodder. Both produced consistent groups in the 1 1/2" range, and either round would be outstanding for self-defense. I don't put a gun in any kind of rest. I prefer to "rest" a gun over the top of my car's hood instead of using a solid rest. I know, I know, a rest will produce more accuracy. However, in a gun fight, I don't have time to set up a rest, so I prefer to do my testing off-hand, or using the hood of a car, or a rock, or whatever I can to steady the gun. This gives me a real-world idea

of what the gun will do.

One thing that made the Blackwater Tactical faster in my hands is the sights. Even though there's nothing *wrong* with the sights on my older 226.

With the white dot front sight, and the white bar rear sight, I just find a 3-dot set-up faster to my aged eyes. Plus, that fiber optic green front sight just draws my attention to it, thus allowing for a faster sight alignment.

I also loved the extended beavertail grip tang on the Blackwater Tactical. It made for faster follow-up shots for me. And, the Blackwater Tactical just balances better for some reason. I don't know if it's because of the longer grip panels, the longer magazine or the extended grip tang, but the darn gun balances a whole lot better to my way of thinking. Go figure?

Of course, how any gun feels is purely a subjective thing as well as

how it shoots. I wasn't alone in my testing. I had several other shooters test this gun, and all liked it better than the standard 226. Without a doubt, everyone shot the Blackwater Tactical better than the standard 226. My youngest daughter, who is getting ready to turn 21, was home from college for a few days and she had a chance to shoot it also. She did her best handgun shooting — ever!

Had To Buy It

So, how did I like this gun overall? Well, to put it simply, I bought the sample. It was too good a gun to return. Did I like everything about the SIG Blackwater Tactical? No. Then again, I can usually nit-pick any gun. As already mentioned, I'd rather have 25 LPI checkering instead of the 30 LPI. I'd also like to see SIG send along a set of standard length grips with the Blackwater bear paw logo on



'em for those times you might want to only carry the gun concealed with a 15 round mag instead of a 20 round mag. I got a set of Crimson Trace laser grips just for this purpose. Hard to beat the great laser grips Crimson Trace puts out. The DA trigger pull was heavier than advertised at the start of my shooting. Advertised DA trigger pull weight is around 10 lbs. My sample came in a couple pounds heavier, but lightened up after several hundred rounds of shooting. The SA trigger pull was right at 5 lbs — can't ask for better than that.

Blackwater USA, or Blackwater Worldwide, or if you prefer, "Xe," have what is probably one of the premiere shooting schools in the world, it covers about 20,000 acres total. Of course, not all this terrain is shooting ranges; however, a big portion of this is devoted to shooting ranges. Blackwater's instructors

worked with SIG on this new project and came up with this Tactical pistol. I think it's a real winner. You could do a whole lot worse than the Blackwater Tactical for a duty gun if you ask me. I think some SWAT teams will be taking a close look at this 20-shot 9mm pistol, too. It just screams "tactical" in my mind.

I like to save the best for last in my articles, and that's the price. A standard SIG 226, 9mm pistol with night sights will set you back \$1,000. The new Blackwater Tactical will set you back \$1,300. Do I think the extra money is worth it? You bet I do! Feature-for-feature, the Blackwater Tactical is a better gun, with better features, than the standard SIG SAUER 226 is. What's not to like? You have the SIG name, reliability, accuracy and ruggedness along with the improvements the Blackwater training center came up. It's a win-

win situation in my book.

I'm waiting to hear back from SIG on the Blackwater name change I don't know if the gun you'll buy will be marked with "Blackwater USA" on it, along with the bear paw logo, or if SIG will change the name on the new guns to reflect the "Xe" name — stay tuned! 🗡️

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