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GUN SALES, REVIEWS, & INFORMATION

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# 9MM LEVER GUN?

The PLA-9 Tombstone is POF-USA's take on what a modern fast-handling lever-action carbine should be!

By David M. Fortier, Senior Field Editor

**New from POF-USA is a thoroughly modern box magazine fed 9mm Parabellum lever-action carbine called the Tombstone! (Photo by Sean Utley)**

I have to say, I was quite surprised when I first handled POF-USA's Tombstone carbine. While it is a manually operated lever-action design with your traditional trigger guard lever, the rest of the design departs far from ordinary "cowboy gun" looks. My initial reaction to shouldering the Tombstone is that POF-USA has designed a wonderfully modern 9mm lever-action carbine for personal protection, competition, recreational shooting, and hunting. It is surpris-

ingly light, very fast to the shoulder, and swings like lightening. The throw of the lever is short and feed is from a detachable box magazine. Better still, all manner of modern optics and accessories are easily mounted.

Lever-action rifles and carbines are a staple of American gun culture. Dating back to the 19th Century, they played an important role in the history of our country. In the hands of hunters, trappers and settlers, Henry,

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**POF-USA has designed a wonderfully modern 9mm lever-action carbine for personal protection, competition, recreational shooting and hunting.**



**The Tombstone is surprisingly light, very fast to the shoulder and swings like lightning.**

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Winchester, and Marlin lever-actions put meat in the pot and provided protection from two and four-legged threats. Lesser known, but also noteworthy, is the Spencer which served with the US military. Chambered in a wide variety of pistol and rifle caliber rimmed cartridges, the lever-gun did more than just “win the West” it became an American symbol.

The popularity of the lever-action style was not confined to the United States though. Lever-action repeating rifles proved very popular both North and South of the border. Winchester M1866 rifles, in .44 Henry Rimfire, even showed up in the hands of Ottoman troops in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78) where they were used to great effect. Winchester

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**America’s love affair with lever-action guns began with Volcanic Repeating Arms Co. and one of their repeating magazine pistol/carbines is seen here. It dates from 1856. Photo taken at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West museum in Cody, Wyoming.**



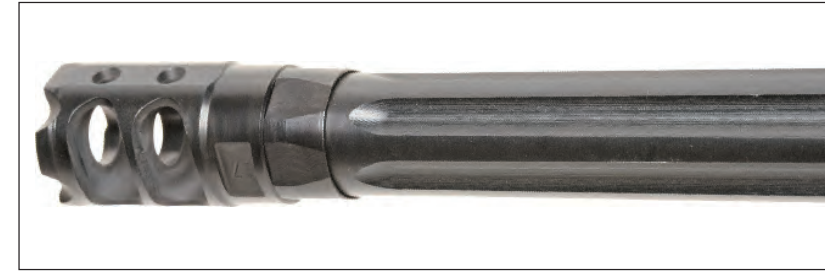
**Lever-action rifles from Henry, Winchester and Spencer were all popular during the 19th Century and they played an important role in our nation’s history. Photo taken at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West museum in Cody, Wyoming.**



**While the various Winchester models are the best known, other makes and models saw use. Seen here is a reproduction of a Spencer carbine fielded by the US Cavalry which housed a seven-shot tubular magazine in its buttstock.**

**Running the lever on the Spencer extracted, ejected and chambered the next cartridge. However, the hammer had to be cocked manually.**

With its muzzle brake, free-floating rail, angular looks and detachable box magazine POF-USA's Tombstone has a certain edge to it. (Photo by Sean Utley)



A dual baffle muzzle brake is fitted to reduce felt recoil. Also note the heavily fluted barrel to reduce weight.



The free-floating handguard features M1913 "Picatinny" rails, M-LOK slots and multiple QD sling socket mounting points.



The beefy receiver has sort of a Winchester M1873 vibe to it with its angular lines. Note the ejection port, mag release button and optics rail with rear sight.



A look at the mag release button on the left side of the receiver and the cross bolt safety.



The magazine is proprietary design by POF-USA, and used in their Phoenix semi-automatic 9mm pistol. It is available in 10-, 20-, and 35-round capacities.



A Magpul stock is fitted with a comfortable rubber buttpad and two sling slots.

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M1895s fought in the trenches of World War I in the hands of Imperial Russian troops, and later turned up in the Winter War of 1939-40 in the hands of Finnish soldiers. Some of these World War I-vintage stripper clip fed Winchesters would go on to serve on the Eastern Front during World War II.

It was the American sportsman though who truly fell in love with lever-action rifles. Why though did older designs from Winchester, Savage, and Marlin remain popular throughout the 20th Century? Winchester and Marlin rifles both have a certain appeal to them and Savage Model 99s have a cult following. They tend to be handy and easy to carry. They maneuver well and are fast to the shoulder and provide a very quick follow-up shot. The big bores in .45-70 and .444 Marlin are loved for their performance on target.

The .357 and .44 Magnums hold a surprising amount of cartridges and are very fast firing. While their roots date back to the 19th Century, hunters and shooters still like them simply due to all they bring to the table.

While the popularity of different types of guns rises and wanes in a never ending cycle, I've been a bit surprised at just how popular lever-action rifles remain. One of the most popular articles on our website (FirearmsNews.com) is a piece written by Pat Sweeney on a Marlin M1895 .45-70 Government outfitted with

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The action is run by a lever which forms the trigger guard and hand loop. The throw is short and does not require much effort. (Photo by Sean Utley)



The two lightest loads used during testing were Lehigh Defense's 90-grain Xtreme Defender and Liberty Ammunition's 50-grain Civil Defense +P.

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a suppressor and red dot sight. It's obvious that not only are lever-action rifles popular, but many hunters/shooters wish to add modern optics and accessories to them.

POF-USA recognized the interest in lever-action rifles and where the market is heading, and designed their new PLA-9 Tombstone carbine. The result of their labor is an eye-catching piece very different in form from a traditional "cowboy gun." Despite its name, POF-USA's Tombstone looks to the future rather than the past. With its muzzle brake, free-floating rail, angular looks and detachable box magazine it has a certain edge to it.

Is there a place or a need for a "modern lever-gun"

though? I suppose that will depend upon who you ask. Purists will always say the same thing, so they don't matter. More and more hunters and shooters though are interested in the benefits of mounting modern accessories onto a lever-action rifle. A properly mounted sling, a good white light and rugged enclosed red dot sight provide real benefits. This is especially true for personal protection.

Plus, shoving archaic rimmed revolver cartridges through the loading gate into a tubular magazine is a drag. It's also mind numbingly slow, especially with cold fingers. Many shooters today would much rather have the speed and convenience of a detachable box magazine. Plus, in the wake of the most



Federal's 124-grain Punch JHP is a premium personal protection load which provides a good mix of expansion and penetration.



Black Hills Ammunition's 124-grain JHP +P load provided impressive velocity averaging 1,448 fps.



SIG Sauer's 115-grain 365 Elite FMJ load was not to the Tombstone's liking and did not feed well.



The heaviest load tested was Federal's 147-grain Syntech Solid Core Flat Nose which functioned and shot well.



recent ammo shortage, many shooters are loath to stock another caliber such as .357 Magnum. Having a lever-action carbine chambered in 9mm means it can share ammunition with their common carry gun. This is an important point for many. While the 9mm Parabellum takes a backseat to the .357 Magnum in terms of raw performance, the 16-inch barrel will certainly aid velocity.

Unfortunately, there is also the topic of gun control that must be considered. In some areas, or if you are traveling, a typical semi-automatic AR-15 may not be an option. Some might consider a pistol caliber lever-action carbine as a suitable alternative for personal protection if semi-auto carbines are prohibited. The advantages over say a pump-action 12 gauge shotgun is reduced recoil and higher magazine capacity. Just food for thought.

Examining POF-USA's Tombstone you will note a dual baffle muzzle brake to reduce felt recoil. While the 9mm Parabellum cartridge has mild recoil from a carbine, this further reduces it facilitating faster follow-up shots. If you prefer a different device, the brake can easily be removed. The Tombstone, with its manually operated action, is a natural suppressor host. Keep in mind, with a semi-automatic design, a certain amount of gas, and thus noise escapes out the ejection port as the firearm cycles. This does not occur with the manually cycled Tombstone. Everything goes out through the suppressor. So, the Tombstone has an advantage over auto-loading firearms when quiet is the name of the game. Teamed with a good suppressor, such as Silencer Central's Banish 45, and 147- or 158-grain subsonic ammunition and it can be very quiet.

The Tombstone features a tapered and fluted 16-inch barrel. For as light as the Tombstone is, I was surprised by the barrel diameter at the breach, but it's taper and deep fluting reduce the weight and aid its balance. Muzzle threads are 1/2x28 and rifling is one turn in 10 inches. Surrounding the barrel is a free-floating handguard. This is cut away in the center at 12 o'clock to reduce weight. At the front of the rail, at 12 and 6 o'clock, are short 1913 "Picatinny" rail sections. M-LOK slots are machined in at 3, 6 and 9 o'clock for mounting accessories. Quick detach (QD) sling swivel socks are placed at the front and rear of the rail at 3 and 9 o'clock. The rail bolts securely to the receiver.

At the top of the receiver is a section of 1913 rail approximately 5.2 inches in length for mounting optical sights. The Tombstone does have iron sights, and they are actually quite good for a 9mm carbine. The front sight consists of fixed blade with a white line. The rear sight is an aperture adjustable for windage and elevation. While the sights are simple in form, the sight picture is excellent. The rear sight is locked into place by two opposing screws. Loosen these for zeroing.

The bolt features a spring-loaded firing pin and claw extractor. A bar ejector is bolted to the left side

Thanks to its light weight and balance the Tombstone handles well and is fun to snap shoot with. (Photo by Ashley Jaderborg)



Practical accuracy with the iron sights was very good and it's a fun carbine to shoot. (Photo by Ashley Jaderborg)



The Tombstone is left-hand friendly if you are a south paw. (Photo by Ashley Jaderborg)



My first five shots fired on steel at 30 yards proved well centered but low.

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POF-USA offers this design in capacities of 10, 20, and 35 rounds. Pricing runs from \$27 to \$36.

The action is run by a lever which forms the trigger guard and hand loop. The throw is short and

does not require much effort. Pushing down/forward on the lever extracts and ejects the fired cartridge case while cocking the hammer. Pulling back/up on the lever strips a cartridge from the magazine, feeds

it into the chamber and locks the bolt. Pushing the cross-bolt safety to the right places the Tombstone on safe. Pushing it to the left places it on fire. The safety cannot be manipulated with the hammer all the way

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The front sight is a fixed blade with a white line which works well.



The rear sight is an aperture, and the sight picture is quite good.

of the receiver and is easily replaceable. An ejection port is machined out of the right side of the receiver. The Tombstone features an external hammer with a half-cock notch and a cross-bolt safety. The tail of the firing pin which cocks the hammer, and the hammer itself has a Winchester 1873 vibe to it.

Where things get funky is when it comes to how the Tombstone feeds 9mm Parabellum cartridges. In place of the traditional tubular magazine underneath the barrel is a magazine well machined into the bottom of the angular receiver. This accepts a polymer double-stack central feed detachable box magazine. Capacity is 20 rounds. The mag well is nicely contoured to aid insertion and the magazine locks easily into place with a simple upward push. On the left side of the receiver is an AR style mag release button. This is too far forward though to reach with your trigger finger if

you are a right handed shooter. It works marvelously though if you are firing left-handed. Thoughtfully POF-USA also provides a magazine release on the left side of the receiver. This works great for a right-handed shooter, just grab the magazine and depress it with your thumb.

The first question my friend James Tarr asked when discussing the Tombstone was what magazine does it use? Does it feed from a Glock magazine or another commonly available design? Unfortunately no, it does not feed from a Glock or other common design. The proprietary curved polymer magazine is the same as used with POF-USA's Phoenix 9mm semi-auto pistol.

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Here is a 50 yard five-shot group fired with Liberty Ammunition's 50-grain Civil Defense load which averaged an impressive 2,346 fps.



If you know how to run a lever gun the Tombstone can put lead on target very quickly. (Photo by Sean Utley)

The Tombstone is easily accessorized if you so choose. It's seen here with a Banish 45 suppressor, white light and red dot sight. (Photo by Sean Utley)

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down. The safety can be operated with the hammer in the half- and full-cock positions.

The trigger bow is straight with a slight angle at the bottom. The trigger itself is a single-stage design with zero creep. It breaks very cleanly with a pull weight of approximately four pounds. I have no complaints concerning the trigger. It's crisp and light just like you want a lightweight fast handling carbine.

A Magpul stock is fitted to the rear of the receiver. This features a soft rubber pad which keeps the butt from sliding around on your shoulder. Sling mounting points are located on the left and right side of the stock. Length of pull out of the box is approximately 12.5 inches. This worked well for me but you can lengthen the butt or add a higher cheek riser if you so desire. Overall length of the Tombstone is 35.7 inches and it weighs in at 5.8 pounds. Balance point is the magazine well.

I thought it would be interesting to see how the Tombstone performed with a variety of loads and rooted around in my ammo bunker to find suitable candidates. I eventually selected seven 9mm Parabelum loads for testing. These ranged in weight from 50 to 147 grains and consisted of both standard pressure and +P loads. Test ammunition consisted of Liberty Ammunition's 50-grain Civil Defense +P, Lehigh Defense's 90-grain Xtreme Defender, Barnaul's steel case 115-grain FMJ, SIG Sauer's 115-grain 365 Elite FMJ, Federal's 124-grain Punch JHP, Black Hills Ammunition's 124-grain JHP +P and Federal's 147-grain Syntech Solid Core Flat Nose.

Accuracy testing was conducted from a benchrest using a rear bag. A Bushnell 4-16x50mm scope was mounted and zeroed. Testing was then conducted at 50 yards with four five-shot groups fired with each load, and velocity measured using a LabRadar Doppler chronograph. Getting to work, I noted the magazine was a bit fussy to load. The magazine inserts easily and locks securely into place with an upward push. The lever takes little force to operate and the safety is easy to manipulate from a firing grip. The trigger is good and recoil is very mild making the Tombstone very fun to fire. The good trigger is definitely an aid to accuracy.

Function wise, things started off well as I began testing using the Russian steel case FMJ load from Barnaul. This functioned flawlessly. As I tried different loads though, I found some, like SIG Sauer's 365 Elite 115-grain FMJ load, would not feed reliably. Others fed and functioned fine. Oddballs like Liberty's and Lehigh's ran without issue. Perhaps it was this individual magazine, but some loads fed great and others had issues.

Accuracy from the bench at 50 yards varied a bit with Liberty Ammunition's 50-grain Civil Defense having the tightest average of three inches. It also posted the highest velocity averaging a smoking 2,346 fps. Lehigh Defense's 90-grain Xtreme Defender averaged three inches at 1,435 fps while Federal's 147-grain Syntech Solid Core Flat Nose averaged three inches at 1,267 fps. I was a bit surprised by the Lehigh 90-grain load's velocity. I expected it to be higher and it was surpassed by Black Hills Ammunition's 124-grain

The Banish 45 is interesting as it's a multi-caliber design able to suppress calibers from .45 ACP down to rimfire. A modular design, it can be run in either a Long or a Short configuration.



The Banish 45 can be run in its short configuration, as seen here, with a length of 6.7 inches and a weight of just 9.6 ounces



A Banish 45 silencer was fitted to the POF-USA Tombstone during testing and it performed well with no issues. (Photo by Sean Utley)

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customers. They have an entire department of knowledgeable people who will help you decide on what brand and model of silencer best meets your needs and budget. Plus, they offer a free NFA Gun Trust. Want some peace of mind they know what they are doing? They are the only silencer reseller on the ATF advisory board. When your paperwork is approved by the ATF they will even ship your silencer directly to your door! For more information visit [SilencerCentral.com](http://SilencerCentral.com). **FN**

## POF-USA PLA-9 TOMBSTONE CARBINE ACCURACY AND VELOCITY CHART

Load	Bullet Weight (gr)	Velocity (fps)	SD	50 yards (in.)
Liberty Civil Defense +P	50	2,346	115.6	3
Lehigh Defense Xtreme Defender	90	1,435	8.3	3.1
Barnaul FMJ	115	1,350	15.9	3.2
SIG Sauer 365 Elite FMJ	115	1,405	15.5	4.5
Black Hills JHP +P	124	1,448	12.8	4
Federal Punch JHP	124	1,358	7.3	4.6
Federal Syntech Solid Core FN	147	1,267	8.6	3.1

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups fired from a rest. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded with a LabRadar Doppler chronograph at an ambient temperature of 35 degrees F at 1,030 feet above Sea Level. SD = Standard Deviation, FN = Flat Nose, JHP = Jacketed Hollow Point, FMJ = Full Metal Jacket.

JHP +P load which averaged 1,448 fps. This load averaged four inches at 50 yards. The rest of my shooting results can be found in the accompanying chart.

Moving from the bench, I switched to shooting with the iron sights on steel silhouettes and plates. Here the Tombstone acquitted itself well. Its weight and point of balance make it both nimble and quick handling. The sight picture is very good with a fairly wide front sight combined with a generous-sized aperture. This combination worked very well for me, although, the point of impact was a bit low as received. Snapshooting with the Tombstone is a lot of fun, especially on steel.

The great short-coming of traditional lever-action rifles is their tubular magazine. This both limits their capacity and makes them monotonously slow to reload. While you can increase down-time through extensive practice, tube magazines are a relic of the past best reserved for shotguns. The Tombstone cycles fast, and when it runs dry reloading is fast and simple. Reach up, grab the empty magazine and hit the magazine release with your thumb and pull it free. Either drop or retain the empty magazine and then grab a loaded magazine and insert and lock into place. Tug to ensure it is securely locked and run the lever to feed one into the chamber. You are ready to go.

I ran drills in low and no-light scenarios as well. Being able to easily mount a white light is a definite advantage. The same goes for a red dot sight. Performance was very good, but I did notice quite a bit of flash off the muzzle brake. This varied by load but is quite noticeable. If you preferred less flash it would be a simple matter to swap the brake for a flash suppressor.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

David M. Fortier has been covering firearms, ammunition and optics since 1998. He is a recipient of the Carl Zeiss Outdoor Writer of the Year award, and his writing has been recognized by the Civil Rights organization JPFO. In 2007 he covered the war in Iraq as an embedded journalist.

The Tombstone carries nicely, although it feels different than a traditional lever gun due to the magazine. Grasp it just in front of the magazine with your left hand and it carries nicely over hill and dale. Add a sling and you hardly notice it's there. Temperatures during testing hovered between 30 and 40 degrees and I noted the Tombstone easily accommodates light gloves.

All in all, POF-USA's Tombstone is a very interesting design. It has a lot of nice features. I wish I had more magazines as simply swapping mags might have cured my feeding issues. The Tombstone's looks and features are sure to appeal to many. The downside is a fairly steep price of entry with an MSRP of \$1,962.00. If the concept of a modern lever-action carbine turns your head though, visit [POF-USA.com](http://POF-USA.com) for more information.

If you have any thoughts or comments on this article, we'd love to hear them. Email us at [FirearmsNews@Outdoorsg.com](mailto:FirearmsNews@Outdoorsg.com). **FN**

## POF-USA PLA-9 TOMBSTONE CARBINE SPECIFICATIONS

Caliber:	9x19mm Luger
Operation:	Manual via swinging lever
Barrel Length:	16 inches
Barrel Twist:	1-10 inches, RH twist
Trigger:	Single-Stage
Feed:	Detachable 20-round box magazine
Overall Length:	35.7 inches
Weight:	5.8 pounds
Sights:	Fixed front blade with white line, fully adjustable rear aperture
Finish:	Hard Coat Anodized and Black Nitride
MSRP:	\$1962.00
Contact:	(623) 561-9572, <a href="http://POF-USA.com">POF-USA.com</a>