

After Market Upgrades Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1. Yes Or No?

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Before you even begin comparing a bare bones Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 Pistol with an upgraded version it is important to know what purpose you have for the gun.

Invariably, some upgrades are more suited for self defense while others are better for target shooting. If you don't know how each upgrade changes the gun's capacity to shoot accurately, reliably, or in small groups, it is all too easy to wind up with a weapon that doesn't meet your needs. Have a look at some of the most common upgrades and how they change the functionality of the base weapon.

The Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 pistol makes a good platform to be modified for personal defense (combat) or the target use. You must do your research to determine which upgrades will be the best for the project. Usually, the less you do to the weapon at one time, the better the results.

It is best to try out each change to see how it works before moving onto something more complicated. The last thing you want to do is to get carried away on the upgrades and end up with a pistol that is worse than the base design you started with.

Starting With an Older Base Model vs a Modern One

For most people the simpler service grade options are usually the best. Most people don't need to spend thousands of dollars to upgrade this weapon in order to get the best possible self defense gun.

In most cases, you can shoot well, accurately, and reliably with no changes to the base model regardless of its manufacture date. Historically, and in my opinion, the Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 is the best service pistol you can find. It is built from good quality materials and was made to last a long time under heavy usage.

Since new and old versions of this pistol are designated as a combat design out of the box, they already has the following features:

- The main spring is arched instead of flat.
- The trigger pull is short.
- This gun is designed to shoot fast and still remain easy to control.

Insofar as sights, the models used on earlier versions of the Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1s were primitive when compared to newer designs. They will still work on these older weapons if you are planning to shoot in ranges from 7 to 50 yards, and at a slower pace.

Unfortunately, if you need to shoot fast, these sights can be harder to line up. Fortunately, modern Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 pistols use high profile sights that correct this problem.

When looking at older models of this weapon, you will find that they were a lot looser than today's versions. You can expect some lateral play in the slide as well as some rattling when the gun is shaken. These sounds have no meaning since the barrel bushing and the barrel lugs are tight enough for fair to good accuracy.

Newer versions of this gun are tighter than the average older models, and there is very little lateral play in the slide. However, the barrel bushing is only finger tight and similar to the older models.

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It should also be noted that older versions of the Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 pistols have a trigger pull of around 7 pounds. If you do not want such a heavy trigger, than the newer models that have only a 4.5 trigger will be more to your liking; especially if you are interested in firing quickly and accurately.

In fact, the improved trigger action and better sights make the newer version of the Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 a better investment out of the box, especially if you need more time to think about appropriate upgrades.

Unlike other modern 1911-A1 Mil-Spec pistols, modern Springfield 1911-A1 Mil-Spec pistols utilize a heavy firing pin spring and a lightweight firing pin instead of a firing pin block or drop safety. Aside from being a very safe system that works well, you will also have 4 less parts to deal with than in a model with the Series 80 firing block system.

Popular After Market Parts and Machining for Combat Upgrades

To begin, the Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 only came with rear cocking serrations on the slide. Adding front cocking serrations is a good upgrade to the slide that will make cocking the pistol easier. While you are having the serrations added, do not forget to have the sharp edges removed from the slide.

This will reduce the risk of your hand being cut if it gets in the way of the slide as it recoils backward. Here are some other upgrades to consider:

Enlarge the injection port and teardrop it

Smaller ejection ports on older Mil-Spec 1911-A1s made them less reliable. Enlarging the injection port on older models will make them as reliable as modern models that already have larger ports. Teardropping the ejector port makes it easier for the weapon to eject the brass because it enables the slide to strike the cartridge lower on the brass, which reduces the risk of a stove pipe malfunction.

Sights

Fixed sights are much more rugged and will last longer than adjustable sights on a combat 45 ACP. Remove and replace old rear and front sights with a low profile Novak style front and rear sight system. The front sight should be properly silver soldered into place so it will not come loose and fly away during shooting. These sights are snag free with the rear sight being adjustable for windage. They both have tritium inserts for low light shooting situations.

Match Barrels and Bushings

Match barrels and bushings can give you a good increase in your pistol's accuracy. It is usually done on more advanced pistols. I would recommend it on any combat pistol.

Throating

Most Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1s without a match barrel and bushing require throating and matching of the feed ramp to the barrel for any ammunition except hardball. Throating of the barrel and polishing the feed ramp in the frame are good ideas to have done to keep your Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 pistol from having failure to feed problems.

Guide Rods

Shorter guide rods can be disassembled easier and faster. It also allows for an instant press check to see if the pistol is loaded. On the other hand, upgrading to a one or two piece full length guide rod increases accuracy and smooths out the action.

While a two piece guide rod is easier to disassemble than a one piece, it requires an Allen wrench to loosen and separate the recoil spring guide. I prefer the full two length guide rods because they are easier to use and improve the gun's performance.

Recoil Springs

Installing a slightly heavier recoil spring is one of the best upgrades for your weapon. Try an 18 ½ vs the 16 that most Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 45ACP pistols come with. The heavier spring offers a little more power when chambering a round.

Firing Pins

Springfield uses special undersized titanium firing pins in their Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1s. This is because of the California drop test. Since there is less mass, the gun is less likely to fire if dropped. For your safety, stay with the original firing pins. Don't change them to steel firing pins!

Stippling on the forestrap gives you a firmer and more secure grip than on the normal bare frame. This will go a long way to improving accuracy. A firmer grip also reduces the chance that your hand will slide up and hit the slide as it recoils.

Funnel the Magazine Well

All magazine wells that bolt on to the bottom of the Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1s and the Single action magazine well/main spring housing should be custom fitted to the frame by a competent gunsmith. This upgrade makes it easier to insert a magazine during speed reloading or when your eyes are on the target.

Grip Safety upgrade

The original GI grip safety needs to be replaced with a larger full sized beavertail safety. This larger safety helps to spread the recoil over a greater area and gives the shooter a better initial grip on the pistol. Even a properly dehorned standard grip safety can still do damage to the shooter's hand when it rides up the frame and gets cut by the underside of the slide.

Trigger, Hammer, Sear and Disconnecter - Use match grade triggers, hammers, sears, and disconnectors when upgrading these parts. They are better manufactured, which gives the pistol tolerances a good tight fit. When the fittings are tighter, all of the parts return the same place after each shot. This makes it easier to make tighter groupings during combat shooting.

Trigger

There are two parts to a trigger upgrade to solve problems. The first is the length of the trigger, and the second is the weight and the crispness of the pull. The trigger length is the relationship between the size of your hand and the length of your fingers.

Your trigger finger pad should be square on the front of the trigger otherwise you will pull to one side. It's to your advantage to try both the long and short triggers, then choose one that fits you the best. The Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1s uses a rounded cross section at the front which makes the trigger pull feel heavier.

These GI triggers should be replaced by a commercial trigger.

If your pistol has a crisp trigger pull between 4 and 4 ½ pounds, then you don't need a trigger job. Trigger pulls less than 4 pounds should be avoided on a combat pistol because they are too light and can cause accidental discharges. After a trigger upgrade, do not release the slide with the slide stop.

This can jar the pistol and drop the hammer to half cock instead of full cock. When the slide is locked back and a new magazine is inserted. Cycle the slide as if it is in battery and this problem should not occur.

If you added an extended beavertail grip safety to your Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 45ACP, you must either bob the hammer or install a Commander style hammer. The Commander style hammer is a loop or skeletonized lighter hammer which give it a faster firing cycle for the gun.

This hammer is less likely to get snagged on clothing when drawn from concealment. I personally would not use a bobbed hammer on this particular weapon because this modification causes the grip safety to be trimmed back considerably. This increases the risk that you might put your hand up into the slide when grabbing the pistol.

Change the Slide Release

There are three types of slide releases; standard, tactical, and extended. It is up to individual taste and whether or not you can operate the release without the extensions. If you choose to use the extended slide release, it can be dangerous because they can extend back nearer to the thumb and can be engaged by the thumb in recoil.

Change Safety to a Extended (Tactical) or Ambidextrous Safety – As a responsible and safe gun owner, you should never take the safety off your loaded weapon unless you have a need to. Unfortunately, the safety on the standard Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 45ACP can be missed in both practice and active shooting situations.

In a dangerous situation, the panic alone can spell disaster. The extended safety gives you a shelf to rest your thumb on when shooting, which can help improve accuracy. The tactical and ambidextrous safeties can reduce the risk of missing the safety when you need to shoot the gun.

Since the thumb safety can get bumped into the on safe position, having a shelf to rest your thumb on can help eliminate that problem. I personally like and use the tactical safety because it is wider than the standard safety which makes it easier to use and locate when needed.

Some shooters also prefer to have the safety to be accessible from both sides of the pistol. This can be helpful if you are a left handed or an ambidextrous shooter. Others feel the ambidextrous safety is important because it makes it possible to take off the safety with your left hand if the right hand or arm is injured.

Polishing of the Feed Ramp

Polishing the feed ramp in the frame helps the pistol to feed better, which reduces the risk of having the bullet jam. This is an essential and important upgrade.

Grips

Upgrading the pistol's grip is a personal choice. The grips can be made of wood, antler, rubber, or any other material of your choosing. The most important factors are they must fit the gun, your hand, and they are comfortable to shoot with.

In conclusion, The Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 is an excellent platform for upgrading into the combat pistol of your dreams. The original Springfield Mil-Spec 1911-A1 is a good pistol for a basic self defense weapon, but can be made even better with certain upgrades.

You can turn it into an excellent custom pistol, but always keep in mind that not all upgrades are necessary let alone useful for your specific needs. In fact, if you make too many upgrades, you may find that it would have been cheaper to simply buy an already custom built combat 45ACP pistol from a leading manufacturer.

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