

# IS GEN 4 4U?

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1. Slide
2. Barrel
3. Recoil spring assembly
4. Firing pin
5. Spacer sleeve
6. Firing pin spring
7. Spring cups
8. Firing pin safety
9. Firing pin safety spring
10. Spring-loaded
11. Slide cover plate
12. Rear sight
13. Front sight
14. Receiver
15. Magazine catch spring
16. Magazine catch
17. Slide lock spring
18. Slide lock
19. Locking block
20. Magazine floor plate
21. Magazine insert
22. Magazine tube

By ROBIN TAYLOR, USPSA STAFF  
PHOTOS BY ROBIN AND ANYA TAYLOR

Glock has held the lion's share of the Production market for years. Their sponsored shooters have won in Production Division, and have switched up to .40 caliber to win in Limited and Limited-10 divisions as well.

While the 1911 and the AR-15 hold the reputation for being the most-customized guns in the American marketplace, one need look no further than the pages of this magazine to find gunsmiths and after-market parts manufacturers that focus on the Austrian "wonderline" in its various guises. The Brownells catalog has pages and pages of Glock-specific toys, many of which were built strictly for USPSA competition.

Because of this, when Glock announced the release of the "Gen 4" Glock, with their long-anticipated interchangeable backstraps, *Front Sight* had to get one.

**Updating "perfection."** The Gen. 4 Glock introduces backstrap covers, "SF" frame dimensions, a new texture, and an enlarged, *reversible* magazine release. It's a big improvement over the Gen. 3.

### **The Ever-Changing Glock.**

I first started playing with Glocks for the then-new Limited Division in the early 1990s. I've shot representatives of every "Gen" since, winning my first GSSF match with a first-generation "pebble grip" G17 in 1997. That gun was, per the Glock marketing mantra at the time, "Glock perfection." "Perfection" has since been added on to, recalled, improved, or fixed so many times that one would need a small book to record all the variants. I count at least nine different followers,

at least six (possibly seven) frames, at least six magazine body variations, various sight options, there are even versions with manual safeties — and that's just for the Glock 17!

Let me be clear, most of that change *is good*. And this latest "Gen" has some very good updates. Several aspects of the Glock had become dated compared to the current market. While the interchangeable backstraps are obvious, there are other excellent tweaks as well.

**Flexible backstrap covers.** While they don't feel like much when you pick them up, the add-on backstrap covers for the Gen. 4 make a huge difference in the feel of the gun. This one makes the Gen. 4 feel like a Gen. 3.



## Mod. 1: Interchangeable "Backstraps"

Want to build guns for cops? Lately you've got to have interchangeable grip panels to accommodate different hand sizes, and Glock's retrofit offers new flexibility in grip depth.

In essence, the Gen 4 is what Glock enthusiasts would call an "SF" 9mm ("SF" stands for "small frame") with the added ability to extend the grip. Going "SF" means the trigger reach has been shortened, and the curves at the back flattened slightly to make the pistol easier to get your hand around. This makes the mag release easier to reach for people with relatively short fingers (a common anti-Glock complaint).

To pad the "SF" Gen 4 out to the normal "Gen 3" profile, one pins a "backstrap" onto the grip. The medium "backstrap" itself is really a backstrap cover that has little structural integrity of its own. It's a thin bit of polymer, retained by two polymer hooks at the bottom and a slightly over-size, over-length trigger housing pin at the top.



**Left-handed mags.** Shooters who flip the reversible mag release for left-handed operation will need left-side capable mags (above right). Note the extra mag release slot, and the cut on the front to accommodate Glock's strangely-absent "ambi" style magazine release.



**Accessories defeated.** With the various changes to the frame, shooters who want a magwell, extended mag release, or other accessory will need to wait for a new generation of parts.

To make the pistol even longer, mount the "large" backstrap cover instead, and you have a gun somewhere between the standard 9mm frame and Glock's famously-beefy .45 (the Glock 21). While the gun isn't any wider, the length makes it feel as though it is. I have relatively long fingers (I can shoot a Glock 21 easily), so this option appealed to me a great deal.

None of the "backstraps" change the width of the pistol at all. Instead the grip angle changes slightly, and the trigger reach changes. None of the changes are night-and-day obvious from the outside, but they're very noticeable in the hand. Thanks to the rough, rounded surfaces, my measurements in the accompanying table aren't exact, but they give you an idea of how much change is involved.

## Mod. 2: "SF" Style Trigger Housing

Gone are the days when one trigger housing worked in every Glock in the line. To achieve the smaller "SF" frame

dimensions, something had to change inside. That thing was primarily the trigger housing, which is shorter, and has beveled edges. It will NOT work in the Gen 1-3 Glock 17s (I tried).

There are also small changes to the trigger bar, altering some of the geometry relative to the trigger return spring. That part DOES interchange with a Gen 1-3 pistol in a pinch, but I haven't heard back from Glock about potential long-term use.

## Mod. 3: Reversible, Lengthened Mag Release

The new release, combined with the shorter frame will help short-fingered shooters a great deal. The new part doesn't interchange with older Gens because its working surface is 2.5 times longer, and mates up with extra cuts in the frame. The design cries out to be extended for competition use, and reminds me very much of the old Aerotek "Suretouch" mag release system. Indeed, when I handed a Gen. 4 Glock to Mark Carbon, the first thing he did after looking at the sights was reach for the mag release.

"I can touch it!" he exclaimed.

Carbon shot a G35 for years, but had to flip the gun in his hand to reach the magazine release. He still must with the Gen. 4, but much less so.

Glock's earlier ambi release system from the G21SF is conspicuously absent on the Gen 4. The new reversible works like the old single-side style, but has slots for the mag release spring on both sides of the part. More changes inside the frame allow the mag release spring to bend both ways instead of just one.

Grip Dimension	Small	Medium (same as Gen 3)	Large	Glock 21 (.45 ACP)
Trigger reach	2.50	2.60	2.675	2.74
Mid-grip depth	2.05	2.08	2.165	2.25
Grip depth at lanyard loop hole	2.23	2.30	2.38	2.48
Grip width, Gen 2		1.170		
Grip width, Gen 4		1.185		



**Recoil System changed. Note the compound guide rod. It's now partly polymer, partly stainless, and uses multiple springs. Very different from previous "Gens" — and not backwards compatible. Aftermarket firms already offer kits that convert this back to the traditional single-spring style.**

### **Mod. 3A: New Magazine**

Reverse the mag release, and you need a new cut in the magazine to match. The new mags include the standard cut, a mirror-image cut on the opposite side, and the cut in the front of the magazine that was used with the "ambi" system.

### **Mod. 4: Frame Rails**

Frame rails have caused Glock plenty of headaches in recent years, particularly the rear two. According to Glock there was a batch that was particularly crack-prone, but frame cracks appeared outside that serial number range as well. Cracking of the rear rails has become common enough that armorers now test for it. With that background, it was a surprise to see the short rails normally used on the front of the pistol retained both fore and aft. According to Glock the crack propagation issue has been solved, but since that's apparently a matter of very small angular changes, I could find no way illustrate that change.

### **Mod. 5: Recoil Guide Rod**

Glock raised eyebrows when they adopted a telescopic guide rod system for their subcompact models 26 and 27. The idea worked well and solved some technical issues with the short guns, creating a short-enough but reli-

able-enough system for the tiny 9s and .40s. The originals were largely made of thin polymer, but have since incorporated more steel for durability. While there is no obvious reason why a telescopic system would be needed on a full-length pistol, it's here, built in beautiful stainless steel over a polymer central guide rod. This makes changing the recoil spring weight to suit personal tastes very

difficult — so much so that ads in *Front Sight* already offer replacement guide rods that allow one to retrofit a conventional Gen 3-style system into the new Gen 4!

### **Mod. 6: Texture and Grip Width**

In the mix, Glock changed the texture of the pistol's gripping surfaces again, adopting parallel rows of square bumps (rather than the stippling on the Gen. 3 "Rough Texture Frame"). To me, the squares feel more secure than either previous surface. Holding a Gen 2 Glock in one hand, and a Gen 4 in the other with the "medium" backstrap installed, the Gen 2 felt thinner, and almost slippery on the sides. Sure enough, depending on whether you measured from the peaks or the valleys relative to the bumps, the Gen 4 is about 15/1000s of an inch thicker, climbing from 1.170 to 1.185 total width. That may sound trivial, until you go to mount an after-market magwell or laser, and find the

part is cutting into the frame!

### **Aftermarket Angst**

For the Production contender, the Gen 4 offers greater flexibility, can be used left-handed, and will make a lot of small-handed shooters much happier. However, for the Glock jockeys in Limited and Limited 10 (led by recent champions David Sevigny and Robert Vogel), attaching after-market parts will be problematic. The grip "void" has changed so that the dust-cover type plugs used in Production will not fit, nor will the Seattle Slug mag guide used by Vogel to win the L-10 title. The same applies to the modular full-circle magwells by Dawson and Lightning Strike that use the void as an anchor point. If you own a Gen 4 gun, be sure to check on which "Gen" your ac-



**Contrasting details. The broader Gen 4 mag release (bottom) reaches further back than the old style. Combined with "SF" frame dimensions, the Gen 4 fits more shooters with short fingers. The new texture also feels more "secure" in the hand than Gen 3's pebble style.**

cessories were built for before you buy!

The same advice applies to buying extended mag releases, drop-in triggers, guide rods and recoil springs. Even laser systems will use that hindmost pin. With the new frame profile, they will not fit either, unless the user installs the “medium” backstrap.

### ***On The Range***

I'd like to say there was some earth-shakingly obvious difference between the recoil of the Gen 3 and Gen 4 thanks to that sexy-looking guide rod system, but when you're shooting it, they're largely the same. Out of the box the 9mm trigger weighed in at a typical 6.5 to 7 pounds, depending on where on the trigger you hung the weight, but *that* part the gun is easily modifiable using Gen. 1-3 parts. With the two guns set up to be identical, the real difference proved to be the texture, which did feel noticeably more “secure” in the hand compared to the Gen. 2/Gen. 3 pebble-and-checkering pattern, or the “RTF” stippling. A good change, that.

Adjusting the trigger reach proved the neatest option of the lot, and should help Glock to keep pace with challenges from its most-comparable competitors, the S&W M&P and Springfield XD/XDM lines.