

Jim-Bob's Ferocious Laser Pistol

Description: It looks like somebody took a plastic revolver-style pistol that shoots foam darts, and: replaced the oversized cylinder with a hand-made electromagnet; put a quartz prism over the muzzle; and glued four D cell rechargeable batteries (plus a lot of circuitry and wiring) onto the sides of the pistol. This is because that is exactly what James Robert Hernandez of Moorhead, Mississippi did.

You know how you hear about some poor person who could have been a world-beater at a particular profession, only they never got their chance? Yeah, that'd be Jim-Bob, only somebody noticed his engineering ability in the fifth grade *and* was in a position to do something about it. High school graduate by fourteen, Doctor of Philosophy from Caltech by twenty -- and that last year? Jim-Bob was just marking time until he finished up the residency requirements. After that was all done, Jim-Bob... went back to his parents' house in Moorhead and got himself a job as an auto mechanic.

When asked why, he replied that he felt like having a working vacation.

That vacation ended last week, when Dr. Hernandez walked into one of DARPA's Defense Sciences Office with his Ferocious Laser Pistol. It's real. It's spectacular. It has the punch of a M249 light machine gun while weighing less than a M4 carbine -- and there's no kick to it, almost no moving parts, nothing *to* foul, and it runs on D batteries. Best of all? It's *understandable*. The spin-offs from this device are so potentially valuable, DARPA has already secured the *doodles* made by the engineer brought in to quick-assess the FLP. Better safe than sorry.

But all of this does cause a major problem. To wit, getting Jim-Bob and his FLP somewhere *safe*. He'll go along with that; after all, he brought it to the Feds himself, right? But Jim-Bob has his own opinions on the best way to get to that safe location, and they don't involve skulking about and being so sneaky that you stick out. Nah, he figures a road trip is honestly the safest way to get to... wherever they're going. Especially since it'll all be on Uncle Sam's dime, too.

And Uncle Sam is being very, very mindful of the Aesop fable about the goose and the golden egg. Keep Jim-Bob safe, keep him happy, and *keep him out of the papers*. Which may be hard, because the guy's amazingly socialized, despite being a twenty two year old

engineering *wunderkind*. Fun to drink with, too. *Far* too fun to drink with, so watch out for that...

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