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RED-DOT EDC PISTOLS

We have seen the trend toward red-dot sights on everyday carry pistols. Now the optics are smaller, and the newest generation can be mounted directly to the slide. But how do they perform?

● **Page 6**

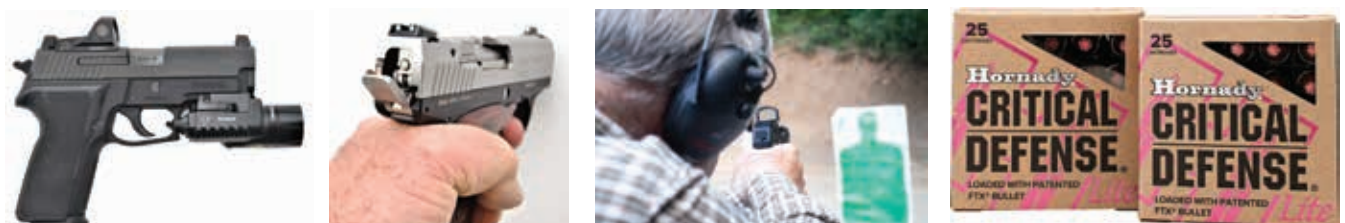


REPLICA REMATCH

In Part 2 of our evaluation of rimfires that look like battle rifles, we test guns from Walther, S&W, ISSC, and S&W. One is a Best Buy, and one gets an F. ● Page 19

TIPS FOR THE OLDER SHOOTER

Aging shooters may have sight and hand-strength restrictions that make some firearms hard to use. We offer a few choices that might make life easier for these folks. ● Page 28



VIRGINIA ATTACKS GUN RIGHTS

Believe me, I get what our job at GUN TESTS is: to compare and grade firearms so you can make informed purchase decisions. But in this tiny sliver of the magazine on page 2, we also talk some politics, because legislation affects your and my ability to own and enjoy firearms, whether we like it or not. At the federal level, I'd love to see items in the National Firearms Act become deregulated. I wouldn't mind owning more suppressors or a short-barreled rifle or short-barreled shotgun. But my hopes for those changes seem to have gone away.



Todd Woodard

And speaking of going away, have you seen how fast gun rights are disappearing in the Commonwealth of Virginia? The governor and both houses of the state legislature are now controlled by Democrats, and that party is making hay while the sun shines. I wish I didn't have to write all the time how gun rights are being throttled by that particular party, but thens the facts. And the Virginia Democrats really hate gun owners and want them disarmed. To wit:

- SB35 is legislation that would undermine Virginia's state firearms preemption law by granting localities the authority to ban firearms, ammunition, and firearm and ammunition components in any governmental building or any public park owned by a locality. Worse still, this language would empower localities to create moving gun-free zones attached to events that would be impossible for law-abiding Virginians to predict.
- SB69 is legislation that would ration law-abiding Virginians to one handgun purchase per 30-day period. Virginia had a one-handgun-a-month law from 1993 to 2012.
- SB70 is legislation that would require a gun owner to obtain government permission before selling or trading a firearm to another individual, without exception. Specifically, the legislation states, "[n]o person shall sell a firearm for money, goods, services or anything else of value" without a background check.
- SB240 would grant the government the authority to seize a person's firearms *ex parte*. An "emergency substantial risk order" would be issued without a hearing or other opportunity for the target of the order to be heard and present evidence. Moreover, this legislation permits the government to seize firearms based on a weak and nebulous standard of evidence — "probable cause."

There's also been mention of confiscation, registration, and other anti-gun measures. It's sad to watch Virginia turn into New Jersey.

GUN TESTS CREDO

REMEMBER: FIREARMS SAFETY AND SECURITY BEGINS WITH YOU

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More 9mm Compacts, Yes

Reader Doug wants to see a side-by-side comparison of 9mm handguns we've tested. We ask him to check page 16. Reader Robert wants to know why we don't test some Texas holster makers.

Re "Four New 9mm Pistols from Stoeger, Arex, Ruger, and SIG," February 2020

Hi, Todd. Let me just begin by saying that I really enjoy your magazine, and it's getting better all the time. The prose and grammar are much better recently than even a couple of years ago. I understand

that the raters aren't trained journalists, and that's another thing that sets y'all apart. But it was sometimes hard to figure out what a phrase or sentence meant, and that was distracting. I like the informal tone, backed up by folks with real-world, practical experience with guns.

Because the 10+ 9mm guns are all the rage, how about a side by side of all of them? I know you just did the Hellcat and 365XL, so maybe that would be a cut and paste. I don't know all the brands making these guns, but I see ads for the SCCY 10+ (don't remember the name), they're cheap, and sold out many places. You haven't reviewed one of their guns in years, and I'd like to see how it stands up to the others. I'd not likely carry one of

these except when I needed deep concealment, so I would rather spend \$250 on an occasional-use gun than \$500. If it works right, all the time.

Finally, I imagine that many of these guns end up being owned and used by the raters long term. How about a paragraph or two every month telling how well the "keepers" hold up as the round count and lint buildup goes up. Thanks for a great pub. I look forward to it, and I know I'll have a nice couple of evenings when I find it in my mailbox. Be cool.

— Doug in VA

Hey Doug: A Value Guide of 40 of our most-recent 9mm comparisons appears on pages 16-17. If you need to dive further into



GUN TESTS REPORT CARD GRADING

Gun Tests Grade: A

A gun with this rating functions perfectly, shoots accurately, and exhibits comfortable, easy use for its owner. We may prefer one gun over others based on its unusual accuracy, superior performance, unusual features, or nice cosmetics. We recognize such a gun for these traits without regard to its cost.

Gun Tests Grade: B

We give this ranking to a gun that functions appropriately for its category, but which might not do as well in major areas as an A-ranked gun.

Gun Tests Grade: C

We may have reservations about some aspect of a gun's performance or pricing. We express those reservations so the reader can balance our concerns with his or her needs.

Gun Tests Grade: D

Some aspect of a gun's performance — in particular, safety, function, or accuracy — doesn't meet our standards and isn't easily resolved.

Gun Tests Grade: F

Some aspect of a gun's performance is dangerous, inappropriate for the category, or is likely to fail.

FIRING LINE

a gun's rating, then your online access will let you do that. I'll add the SCCY to the development list. New guns are coming out fast and furious. — Todd Woodard

Your testing of smallish 9mm pistols seems like an unfair comparison of watermelons to apples. The SIG P365 is 24% to 35% lighter (unloaded) than the Ruger, Stoeger or Arx, yet you fault it for having more felt recoil. Duh. You fail to mention that with the optional 12-round magazine, the SIG carries 12+1 with an almost imperceptibly longer grip. Yet it is still narrower than any of the others. If you choose to carry the available 15-round mag as a spare, that's a huge advantage. The SIG also has an optional thumb safety, not mentioned. You say the sights are good combat sights, but fail to mention they are tritium inserts. In the concealed-carry market, reliability, size, weight, and capacity are arguably the most significant factors, probably in that order. Forget the price difference. Price is irrelevant if my life depends upon it. To be fair, the SIG has a horribly stiff spring, making a mag loader necessary (for me). I believe the SIG P365 currently dominates market share in this segment. Don't ignore the market when evaluating this gun. The closest comparison would be the Springfield Hellcat reviewed a month earlier, if you have one that works. — Paul

Hello GUN TESTS, longtime subscriber here. Great magazine — you explain the basis of your views and let the reader decide the applicability to their situation. Nonetheless, I wanted to offer some comments on your recent review of the SIG Sauer P365. It appears as if the SIG was downrated because, as a “micro pistol,” its handling compared unfavorably to full- or medium-sized pistols. That doesn't seem to be as fair as comparing it to other pistols in its class and rating it accordingly. Comments on small pistol handling

characteristics could be an aside. Unless, of course, you feel all micro pistols should be downgraded at the outset.

Yes, the P365 has a small grip. Whether this makes cleanly releasing the magazine more difficult than with other micro pistols would have been an interesting observation. Similarly, I would have liked to know your comments on what difference the extended 10-round magazine had on firing/recoil with these different micro pistols. And so forth. In other words, more of a focus on comparing apples to apples.

You also downgraded the P365 based upon cost. We all want to know the price of a firearm. It is a (major) factor (for most) in deciding whether to purchase it or not. Despite this, I believe the role of GUN TESTS is to determine the functionality of a firearm and to let your subscribers take this personal choice from there. Cost should have no impact on a firearm's rating.

I know shooters who love the P365 and those who don't. A more precise comparison with other micro pistols would have been more useful to those trying to decide. Again, great magazine. I hope these comments were of some value to you. — Ed

Thank you, Ed and Paul. As popular as the P365 is, more variations are inevitable. So, we'll be revisiting (as in this issue) the platform often, I'd wager. — Todd

Re “Reproduction M1 Carbines: We Test Auto-Ordinance and Inland Manufacturing Models,” February 2017

I have an original Inland M1 carbine, a Universal carbine from the '70s, a newly manufactured A-O paratrooper-stocked M1 carbine and the Inland version. I originally bought the Universal unit so as not to shoot the original carbine, but was disappointed in the Universal rifle. Both the A-O and new Inland



are great shooters, accurate and reliable and fun to shoot.

— Bob Smith @ Gun-Tests.com

How is the magazine's review of a reproduction of a version of the M1 in .30 caliber that was dumped and very few were ever made, because MacArthur wanted to use the existing 30-06 Springfield cartridge, supposed to compare to the M1 in 30-06? The actions are different, cartridges are different. I believe the barrels are different, and the weight and balance are different. I know that the hand-selected M1 I'm getting from the CMP will be more expensive and be well used, with a hodgepodge of parts from a number of reconditionings through the various wars, but at least it will be a factual relic and not something that is easier and cheaper to build than what really went to war.

— bisonwings @ Gun-Tests.com

Re “So Many Good Guns,” September 2019

Some newer guns might be better, but not the revolvers. What happened to real blueing? Now it's all black oxide or stainless finish. Taurus only uses coatings, their “stainless” revolvers are not made of stainless steel like the S&Ws. They are “stainless finish,” which is basically a carbon-steel gun with a silver coating. I called them and asked and that's what they told me. Their blued revolvers are carbon steel with a cold black oxide finish.

It's so thin it rubs off with the slightest rubbing.

— **Radar1 @ Gun-Tests.com**

We don't drill out metal segments to see if the stainless is through and through, but we haven't had unusual wear issues with Taurus revolvers, either. But we'll keep an eye out. Thanks for the tip. — Todd



Re "Driving Holsters Compared," February 2020

I think your magazine is great. Your articles on holsters are thought provoking. I am surprised that you have not included El Paso Saddlery's Double Agent in your

article on crossdraw holsters. I have one, and I find it very comfortable to use when I am driving. It is also great to use as a strong-side holster. You live in Texas, but you have not included either Kirkpatrick or El Paso Saddlery in your articles. Why not?

— **Robert**

No malicious intent. While I myself live in Houston, GUN TESTS writers and testers live across the country. We're not really a Texas-centric publication. — Todd

Hi, Todd. Here's another golden oldie for your consideration: The Hersey 4-way from Ted Blocker. It's a belt slide that can be worn on either side, with forward or



rear cant or crossdraw. Simple, very well made and finished, has adjustable containment screw, comfortable to wear, easy draw. I have two, one for my Colt Officers ACP, the other for my Beretta 92F, each custom molded for their respective sidearms. Long-time subscriber to your really great publication.

— **Marty in NY**

Hey Marty: Thank you kindly for the recommendation. I'm sure other readers will take your advice under consideration. — Todd

Quickie Gun Review

Got a new Walther PPK/S in 22 LR. Palmetto Armory, imported Fort Smith, Arkansas. Double-action trigger weight was 17+ pounds. Rear sight fell off when I took it out of box. Apparently, it wedges into a slot in the frame with a set screw. Poor design. Tech service said it was "normal" when I called. That's my input.



We will take a look. Thanks for the tip. — Todd

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There are two ways to find guns we've reviewed. The Compare Guns feature (top left corner of the page under the logo) allows you to input several descriptors and narrow the search results. Or you can use the Search function. If you search for a common item, such as "22 LR," you'll get tons of references. Basically, the search function finds every instance of the searched-for topic and lists the accompanying articles the topic appeared in. The more specific and unique the reference, the better the search. We do our best to list the catalog numbers for guns we've tested, so that's usually a good place to start. There's also an "Advanced Search" area to help you narrow the results.

*We welcome mail from our readers. To send us comments or questions about previous articles in the magazine, email us at: **GunTestsEditor@icloud.com**. If you'll include the month and year of the article you're writing about, it's a big help. Also, please include your name, address, and phone number. We won't publish your personal information other than your first name, but we may need to contact you about material in your letter.*

GT

Red-Dot EDC Pistols from SIG, S&W, Walther, and Springfield

We have seen the trend toward red-dot sights on everyday carry (EDC) pistols. Now the optics are smaller, and the newest generation can be mounted directly to the slide. But how do they perform?

It may be too simplistic to suggest that competition drives most of the technical advances in the USA today, but sports are nothing if not competition. Just like NASCAR or Formula One racing, technology filters down to the family SUV, the technological advances developed for competitive shooting wind up, eventually, in your everyday carry pistol or hunting rifle. Competition, however, in spite of our best wishes, is not the real world. No matter how realistic the game, we are frequently willing to take risks in our actions or our equipment that would not be acceptable if a life was on the line. Optical sights are a good example of questionable technology. Jerry Barnhart won the 1990 United States Practical Shooting Association National Championship and was the first person to do so with an optical sight. No one has won the Open Division of USPSA since

then using iron sights. But targets don't shoot back.

So, can you bet your life on these sights? Non-magnified red-dot sights are faster and more accurate to use than iron sights. Why else do you think the U.S. military uses them? Why do you think major police departments are starting to adopt them?

We have seen the trend toward red-dot sights on everyday carry (EDC) pistols for some time now. At first, they were big, bulky, and somewhat fragile – not suitable for EDC. Now they are smaller, and the newest generation can be mounted directly to the slide. We also have a whole new crop of EDC-type pistols that come from the factory ready to mount the red-dot sights. Do red dots really improve performance on a small pistol? At self-defense distances? Are they durable over hundreds of rounds?

We tested four different pistols for you using



We used a Shield RMSc red-dot sight, \$400, on three of our four test guns, including the SIG Sauer P365XL (top left), the Springfield Armory Hellcat OSP (bottom left), and the Walther PPS M2 (bottom right). The Smith & Wesson Performance Center Shield Model 2.0, top right, comes with an SMS (Shield Mini Sight). During our test firing, we had no failures with any of the sights and saw good range times.

9MM LUGER RANGE DATA

	SIG Sauer	S&W	Walther	Springfield
Black Hills HoneyBadger 100-grain FTM	P365XL	Shield 2.0	PPS M2	Hellcat
Average Velocity	1186 fps	1176 fps	1170 fps	1138 fps
Muzzle Energy	313 ft.-lbs.	307 ft.-lbs.	304 ft.-lbs.	287 ft.-lbs.
Average Group	2.04 in.	1.00 in.	2.1 in.	2.01 in.
SIG Sauer V-Crown 115-grain JHP	P365XL	Shield 2.0	PPS M2	Hellcat
Average Velocity	1156 fps	1198 fps	1121 fps	1139 fps
Muzzle Energy	338 ft.-lbs.	363 ft.-lbs.	318 ft.-lbs.	328 ft.-lbs.
Average Group	1.73 in.	1.84 in.	2.15 in.	1.65 in.
Speer Gold Dot 124-grain JHP	P365XL	Shield 2.0	PPS M2	Hellcat
Average Velocity	1100 fps	1101 fps	1098 fps	1139 fps
Muzzle Energy	334 ft.-lbs.	307 ft.-lbs.	332 ft.-lbs.	328 ft.-lbs.
Average Group	1.46 in.	1.95 in.	1.93 in.	1.19 in.
Black Hills HoneyBadger 125-grain Subsonic FTM	P365XL	Shield 2.0	PPS M2	Hellcat
Average Velocity	983 fps	955 fps	980 fps	989 fps
Muzzle Energy	268 ft.-lbs.	253 ft.-lbs.	266 ft.-lbs.	272 ft.-lbs.
Average Group	1.33 in.	2.08 in.	2.47 in.	1.64 in.

We collected velocities for each load with a LabRadar chronograph. We shot for groups at 15 yards from a well-sandbagged Caldwell Pistol Rest, using multiple types of practice and defensive ammunition. Self-defense ammo included Black Hills 100-grain HoneyBadger D9N132020 (Brownells.com \$29.97/20 105-001-753WB), 115-grain SIG Sauer 365 V-Crown JHP E9MMA1-365-20 (MidwayUSA.com \$17/20 966280), and 124-grain Speer Gold Dot 23618GD (MidwayUSA.com \$17/20, 966280), as well as 125-grain Black Hills HoneyBadger Subsonic D9N112020 (Brownells.com \$27.62/20 105-001-348WB). We used Remington UMC Green Box 124-grain FMJs L9MM2 (\$12.49/50 LuckyGunner.com) for most of the action shooting.

essentially the same optic to help find out. We used the Shield Reflex Mini Sight Compact (RMSc). Since the initial design in 1996, the original mini-sight has been sold over the years under many names you may well know: Firepoint, Tasco Optima, Trijicon RedDot and JPoint. This parallax-free sight uses a clear polymer optic which, the company claims, is able to withstand more shock than products using a glass optic. The sight body is made from aircraft-grade aluminum and has a matte-black finish. It also employs a variable-intensity drive circuit that senses target light levels and controls the brightness of the LED output to give you the best visibility in varying light levels. Average battery life is supposed to be two to three years. Can the sight survive the tests? Which pistol benefitted most from the addition of the red dot? Does the addition of a more precise aiming system change the utility of the pistol?

How We Tested

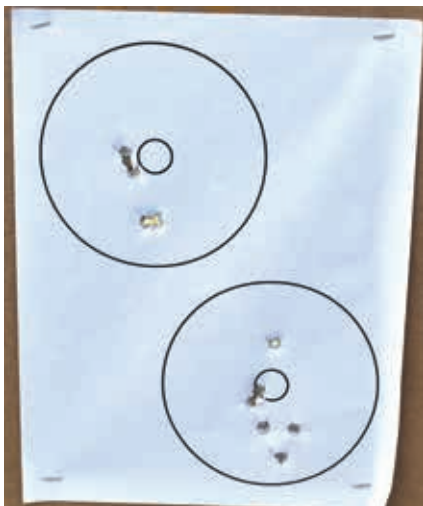
We felt that to test the effectiveness of a red-dot sighting system on an EDC, we needed to have pistols

for which we could also obtain baseline scores in our drills using iron sights. To do that, we got a Springfield Armory Hellcat OSP (Optical Sight Pistol) model and added the Shield RMSc red-dot sight (\$400 at Brownells.com, #100-023-736WB). We added the same sight to the SIG Sauer P365XL 365XL9BXR3 (\$579 at BudsGunShop.com) and mounted the supplied Shield SMS (Shield Mini Sight, made expressly for the Smith & Wesson Shield) to a Smith & Wesson Performance Center Shield Model 2.0 11786 with a 4-inch barrel (\$735 at BudsGunShop.com and price includes the sight). For extra measure, we added in a Walther PPS M2 2805961, \$649 (GunBroker.com best price). This package also includes the Shield RMSc sight.

All pistols were shot from a well-sandbagged rest for accuracy at American Shooting Centers (AMshootcenters.com). We chronographed each load using a Labradar device and recorded multiple five-shot groups for each pistol shot at 15 yards. Other drills ranging in distance from 5 to 50 yards were shot offhand. We launched a variety of cartridge brands,

HANDGUN COMPARISON

In the 5x5x5 drill, we were more accurate using the Shield RMSc red-dot sight, top, versus the gun's iron sights, bottom. We saw similar improvements with the other pistols as well.



shapes, and sizes downrange to test for accuracy and function. For self-defense ammo, we tested Black Hills 100-grain HoneyBadger as well as the 125-grain subsonic HoneyBadger, the 115-grain SIG Sauer 365 V-Crown JHP, and 124-grain Speer Gold Dots. We used Remington Green Box 124-grain FMJ for most of the action shooting. Tabulated results appear in the nearby Range Data sidebar.

Initial Lessons

Size matters. We know this is subjective, but we considered the felt recoil of the smaller Hellcat and Walther to be noticeably heavier than the SIG or the Smith & Wesson. The times of the two smaller pistols were also slower in the drills.

Dots matter. The pistols averaged more than a 20% improvement in accuracy, as measured by group size, when using the Shield RMSc versus iron sights. The red-dot-sighted pistols beat the iron-sighted versions of the pistols on 77% of the drills – sometimes by as much as 85%.

Magazines matter. We tested the pistols in drills using the flush-fit magazine versus the extended magazines. The longer magazines won based on score and time in 87% of those tests.

Sights matter. We shot almost 1000 rounds in four different pistols using four different sights. They all worked perfectly. Our only issue with the Shield RMSc was the way the intensity of the dot was controlled. Most of the time, the proper brightness selected was perfect. However, when we were in bright light and the target was dim or vice versa, we sometimes had too bright of a dot and it was a bit hard to center. Seeing the dot was never a problem.

Shooting the pistols with a red-dot sight mounted requires a slightly different technique than with iron sights. Bring the pistol up into the line of sight, look through the viewport in the sight, find the dot, place that dot on the target and press the trigger smoothly. If the shooter has trouble finding the dot, try bringing the pistol up as if to use the iron sights. When the irons are aligned, the dot should be visible in the

viewport immediately above the iron sights. So, if you are going to have to find the iron sights anyway, why mess with the red dot? Finding the iron sights quickly required practice and so will finding the red dot. After a thousand reps or so, finding the red dot should be pretty automatic. Now the fun starts. You get to focus on the target instead of the front sight, which is what your mind wants to do anyway. The red dot does not have to be aligned perfectly. If the dot is visible on the target through the viewport, press the trigger – smoothly. You don't get to jerk the trigger on an optically sighted pistol either.

Practice matters. By design, we performed the drills using shooters who were not already red-dot experts. Practice would be virtually guaranteed to improve the numbers. This also allowed us to see the difference between red dot and iron sight results using shooters who are most like the GUN TESTS readership.

Here are the gun-by-gun results.

Smith & Wesson Performance Center Shield 2.0 11786 9mm Luger, \$735

The Smith & Wesson Shield has been one of the biggest success stories in American firearms history. Introduced in 2012, S&W now reports sales of more than 3 million units. It is small, easy to carry, and shoots well. It is also relatively inexpensive. What's not to like? Except, perhaps, an only-okay trigger, and maybe the sights could be more visible. The Model 2.0 set out to fix those issues, and the Performance Center made the pistol even better. GUN TESTS acquired the newest model with a 4-inch barrel. The extra barrel length almost puts the pistol into a different category. The longer barrel and the more muzzle-heavy feel make this pistol a bit softer to shoot than the smaller versions. Using the extended magazine, this pistol could have enough ammunition capacity to be considered as a true home-defense pistol, but it is still small enough to easily carry it concealed.

The Performance Center did some extra magic on this pistol. The trigger has been improved considerably both in weight and crispness. Trigger compression only required 4.3 pounds on average. There is some take-up before the shooter gets to the pressure wall, as on most striker-fired pistols. After that point is reached, there is very little creep, and the trigger breaks cleanly. The PC even added an overtravel bump behind the trigger to cut down on required trigger movement and to speed reset.

The sights were improved from the standard three-dot set to fiber-optic sights both front and rear. The front sight is a single, green-optic tube covered by what can best be described as a cage. The rear sight is a double set of red-optic tubes also surrounded by a cage. These cages allow a lot of light to reach the optic tubes while still protecting them from damage. Stippling on the grips has been improved to allow a much more secure grip. It's perhaps even a bit

SMITH & WESSON PERFORMANCE CENTER SHIELD 2.0 11786 9MM LUGER, \$735
GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The longest of the pistols tested in this group, the Shield was, in our opinion, the softest shooting handgun of the four and barely missed being our Best Buy.



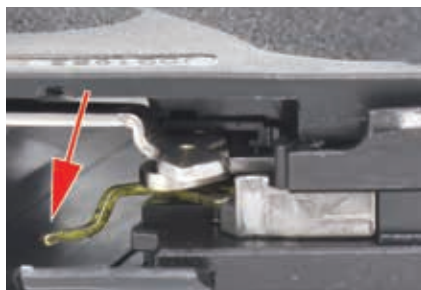
Weight Loaded	26.5 oz. w/9 rounds
Slide Material	Stainless steel, Armornite finish
Slide Retraction Effort	13.7 lbs.
Receiver Material	Polymer
Finish	Black
Front Strap Height	1.8 in.
Back Strap Height	3.0 in.
Barrel Length	4.0 in.
Grip Thickness (Maximum)	0.95 in.
Grip Circumference	5.2 in.
Magazine	(1) 7 round & (1) extended 8 round
Rear Sight	Fiber optic in drift-adjustable dovetail
Front Sight	Fiber optic in dovetail
Sight Radius	5.9 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	4.3 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.1 in.
Safety	Trigger safety, hammer block
Warranty	Smith & Wesson Lifetime Service Policy
Telephone	(800) 331-0852
Website	Smith-Wesson.com
Made In	USA

Action Type	Semi auto, striker fired
Overall Length	7.1 in.
Overall Height	5.13 in.
Maximum Width	1.04 in.
Weight Unloaded (no magazine)	20.1 oz.



Smith & Wesson provides an excellent and well-protected set of sights for the Shield. If the reflex sight goes down on any of these pistols, you still get a backup set of irons.

The arrow points to the Shield's disconnect lever. Make sure to lower this lever before trying to disassemble your Shield.



Here's the Smith & Wesson Shield disassembled. Facing the viewer is the handgun's 4-inch barrel and built-in ramp. The flat-base 7-round magazine shown helps carry it concealed. Trigger compression only required 4.3 pounds on average, with some take-up before the shooter gets to the pressure wall, as on most striker-fired pistols. There's an overtravel bump behind the trigger to cut down on required trigger movement and to speed reset.

HANDGUN COMPARISON

too aggressive in texture, and we would suggest that some sort of garment be worn between the shooter's skin and the pistol. The sides of the slide are scalloped both front and rear to allow the slide to easily be retracted or a to perform a simple and safe press check.

Last, the slide is already milled and drilled for the mounting of a Shield SMS sight, which is included in this package. The SMS version of the sight is slightly larger than the RMSc, but the difference is small enough that we had to use a set of calipers to make sure our eyes weren't deceiving us. The way the SMS sight is mounted on the Shield pistol allows the user to leave the rear sight on the pistol when the SMS is installed. We like that.

Battery longevity is a concern with any electronic device. How long will they last? In the case of an electronic sight, how easy are they to access for replacement? Does the sight have to be removed and, if so, how much work and time are involved to sight the pistol back in? The Shield sight website claims that batteries should last two to three years under normal usage. This is not an on/off switch relying on motion-detecting technology. The sight is on 24/7 and this is just expected battery life. We can't hold onto these guns for years as part of the test, but we can report that sights have stayed on for several months without problems or any weaker beam. The Shield RMSc and SMS models require the sight to be removed to change the battery. We found this to be easy to do, and the zero was closely maintained when we put the sight back on.

Our Team Said: The Shield has the longest barrel we tested in this group of pistols. We felt that extra weight out front softened the recoil and the muzzle flip noticeably. Function was flawless. This pistol had the lightest trigger in this group. While still very safe, we thought it contributed to the overall shooting results. The Shield allowed excellent speed and, except for the magazine capacity, might well have been our overall top pick. If you think eight (plus one) is enough for you, check out the Performance Center Shield.

Springfield Armory Hellcat Micro-Compact OSP HC9319BOSP 9mm Luger, \$550

The Springfield Armory Hellcat OSP (Optical Sight Pistol) is the newest entrant in this playing field, having just been introduced in October 2019. While the other pistols tested in this group were slightly larger than other versions of the same firearm, it would appear that Springfield decided to maintain a minimalist approach with its red-dot EDC solution. This group of testers lives in the very humid South. Even though pocket carry might not be our first choice for a method of concealed carry, it is a fact of life down here during the summer. In our opinion, this is the only pistol of this test group that could still reasonably be carried in a pocket, even with a red dot attached. Overall length is only 6 inches, and

the height, with the red dot attached and a flush-fit magazine, measures a mere 4.75 inches.

The Hellcat OSP, unlike the standard Hellcat, ships with the slide already cut for a red dot but does not offer a package that includes a red-dot sight at this time. The mount on the pistol is designed to fit the Shield RMSc or a JPoint sight. Since no dot sight is included, the pistol comes with a cover plate over the mount. The slide is cut with cocking serrations front and rear. The cover plate, when attached, includes matching serrations that go over the top of the slide – something that is functional and eye-catching. The slide sports an excellent set of sights. The front is a steel blank with a tritium lamp surrounded by a light green plastic insert. The rear is sight “U” shaped with a white outline below. The rear sight does not have to be removed to install the RMSc sight, which we greatly prefer. The height of the sights allows them to co-witness through the red-dot's viewport, making them perfectly usable if the optic fails.

The trigger also reminds us of a product from that little company in Austria, with a couple of improvements. The trigger face is almost flat, allowing the finger to go low on the trigger and provide more leverage. The sear breaks at about 90 degrees, which we prefer, and, like the S&W Performance Shield, there is an overtravel bump behind the trigger, limiting rearward movement. Controls protrude no more than necessary and are recessed into the sides of the polymer frame.

The frame itself has what Springfield calls “Adaptive Grip Texture.” This texture has at least two levels of pyramids, if you will. The higher level has been somewhat flattened to lessen irritation when the pistol is carried against the skin. We could feel the difference in adhesion to our hands when we increased pressure on the grip. But when pressure is applied, a more aggressive point is encountered, and the grip adheres better to the hand. The trigger guard is undercut to allow the highest possible grip. The sides



This is the USPSA target we used for the 15-yard drills. Notice the scoring rings.

**SPRINGFIELD ARMORY HELLCAT MICRO-COMPACT OSP HC9319BOSP
9MM LUGER, \$550
GUN TESTS GRADE: A (OUR PICK)**

An 11+1 pistol, this small Springfield might be the most versatile pistol in the group.



Weight Loaded	23.3 oz. w/12 rounds
Slide Material	Forged steel, Melonite finish
Slide Retraction Effort	17.7 lbs.
Receiver Material	Polymer
Finish	Black
Front Strap Height	1.625 in.
Back Strap Height	2.5 in.
Barrel Length	3.0 in.
Grip Thickness (Maximum)	1.06 in.
Grip Circumference	5.25 in.
Magazine	(1) 11 round & (1) 13 round extended
Rear Sight	Drift adjustable w/white outline U-shape notch
Front Sight	Tritium lamp outlined with high-vis green circle
Sight Radius	5.1 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	5.75 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.875 in.
Safety	Trigger blade, hammer block
Warranty	Limited warranty
Telephone	(800) 680-6866
Website	Springfield-Armory.com
Made In	Croatia

Action Type	Semi auto, striker fired
Overall Length	6.0 in.
Overall Height	5.25 in. w/mag extension and red dot sight
Maximum Width	1.06 in. at slide stop
Weight Unloaded (no magazine)	15.9 oz. with red dot



The Hellcat is closest in size to the smaller SIG P365 (not the P365XL in this test) and still allows the mounting of a reflex sight with the rear sight still attached.



The sights on the Hellcat were visible and fast with or without the reflex sight installed. The Hellcat OSP, unlike the standard Hellcat, ships with the slide already cut for a red dot but does not offer a package that includes a red-dot sight at this time.



Above: The Hellcat disassembles into a few major pieces.



Left: We liked the Hellcat's flat trigger and the two-layer grip texture.

HANDGUN COMPARISON

DRILL #1 DATA

Process: First five shots from low ready, USPSA target, 7 yards.

Pistol	Magazine Used	Time to First Shot (seconds)	Split Average (seconds)	Total Time (seconds)
SIG P365XL	Flush	1.09	.28	2.21
	Extended	1.07	.25	2.05
S&W Shield	Flush	1.28	.32	2.37
	Extended	1.21	.24	2.49
Walther PPS M2	Flush	1.07	.30	2.26
	Extended	1.13	.31	2.37
Springfield Hellcat	Flush	1.22	.33	2.52
	Extended	1.18	.33	2.49

DRILL #2 DATA (5X5X5)

Process: Draw from a concealment holster. Fire 5 shots into a 5-inch circle at 5 yards.

Pistol	Magazine Used	Time to First Shot (seconds)	Split Average (seconds)	Total Time (seconds)
SIG P365XL	Flush	1.58	.32	2.94
	Extended	1.64	.28	2.99
S&W Shield	Flush	1.66	.32	2.94
	Extended	1.64	.28	2.76
Walther PPS M2	Flush	1.89	.44	3.63
	Extended	1.79	.40	3.37
Springfield Hellcat	Flush	2.08	.51	4.12
	Extended	1.94	.41	3.60

DRILL #3

Process: Take five shots at USPSA target from low ready, 15 yards, 25 points max possible. A-zone hits, 5 points; C-zone hits, 2 points; D-zone hits, 1 point. Comstock score is total points divided by time.

Pistol	Sights Used	Time to First Shot (seconds)	Split Average (seconds)	Total Time (seconds)	Points	Comstock Score
SIG P365XL	Irons	1.36	.57	3.74	17	4.55
	Red dot	1.26	.44	3.01	25	8.31
S&W Shield	Irons	1.27	.51	3.30	25	7.58
	Red dot	1.22	.52	3.31	21	6.34
Walther PPS M2	Irons	1.43	.61	3.85	25	6.49
	Red dot	1.50	.53	3.59	25	6.96
Springfield Hellcat	Irons	1.31	.57	3.58	21	5.87
	Red dot	1.17	.56	3.42	21	6.14

DRILL #4

Process: Start at 11 yards, shoot at 8-inch plate.

Take one big step back at each hit. Limit 15 rounds per pistol.

Pistol	Results (Hits/Shots)	Final Hit Distance (yards)
SIG P365XL	14/15	29
S&W Shield	13/15	28
Walther PPS M2	13/15	28
Springfield Hellcat	14/15	29

of the magazine well are relieved to allow the shooter to grab the base plate on the magazine in case of a malfunction. The front strap also includes a standard Picatinny rail. The recoil spring is a double, captured and nested affair that, along with the recoil-spring guide rod, creates some stand-off capability in case something is pushing against the front of the slide.

Perhaps the greatest concern about red-dot sights

are their durability. Will a given sight survive in the real world? We didn't want to abuse the sight, but we didn't want to have to baby it either. We wanted to make sure that the Shield RMSc sights would continue to work through a lot of shooting and a lot of slide manipulations. A video Springfield posted for this pistol and sight combo shows them using the front of the RMSc sight as an edge against which they pushed

SIG SAUER P365XL 365XL9BXR3 9MM LUGER, \$579
GUN TESTS GRADE: A

We graded the P365XL down for the lack of a rear sight when the optic is installed and then gave it extra points for the trigger and its overall performance.



Weight Unloaded (no magazine)	17.8 oz.
Weight Loaded	25.9 oz. with 13 rounds
Slide Material	Stainless steel, Nitron finish
Slide Retraction Effort	14.6 lbs.
Receiver Material	Polymer
Finish	Black
Front Strap Height	2.1 in.
Back Strap Height	2.75 in.
Barrel Length	3.7 in.
Grip Thickness (Maximum)	1.17 in.
Grip Circumference	5.1 in.
Magazine	(2) 12-round flush fit
Front Sight	Fixed with tritium insert
Rear Sight	Drift adjustable with tritium insert
Sight Radius	5.5 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	4.9 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.7 in.
Safety	Firing pin block
Warranty	Limited lifetime
Telephone	(603) 610-3000
Website	SIGSauer.com
Made In	USA

Action Type	Semi auto, striker fired
Overall Length	6.6 in.
Overall Height	5.25 in.
Maximum Width	1.1 in. at magwell only, 1 in. max width at the slide stop



Above: The second longest of our test pistols, the P365XL is the only one of the four that does not retain the rear sight when the mounting plate for the red-dot sight is removed. We preferred the other guns' systems that retained the rear sight so it could be co-witnessed.

Reflex sights use a light, not a laser, and are safe to look at. The Shield RMSc has a cut in the rear of the sight body (arrow) that allows a rear sight/front sight to co-witness while the red dot is installed. This slot can also serve as rear sight.



Above: The SIG has an easy breakdown process. Right: Sporting a generous magwell on a small pistol, reloads on the Sig P365XL were easy and fast.



HANDGUN COMPARISON

in order to rack the slide. Of course, we had to do that, too. The sight didn't fail and didn't lose zero.

Our Team Said: The Hellcat went through more than 200 rounds without a hiccup. The Springfield Armory Hellcat OSP was, in our opinion, the snappiest of the pistols tested. But that didn't stop it from posting very competitive times in our drills. We just had to hold onto the pistol hard. The Hellcat won our overall accuracy tests by a small margin, but win it did. It seemed to shoot everything we fed it. We think that of the four handguns tested here, the Hellcat would be the only pistol that might realistically be pocket-carried if needed — even with the optic installed.

SIG Sauer P365XL 365XL9BXR3 9mm Luger, \$579

SIG Sauer's slightly larger version of the very popular P365 is called the P365XL, which adds another 0.6 inch to the barrel and lengthens the grip frame just enough to add two rounds to the capacity of a flush-fit magazine, bringing the total available to 12 in the mag. SIG recently introduced a 15-round magazine for this pistol that is available through their website at SIGSauer.com. That could bring total onboard ammo capacity to 16 rounds in a small package.

Many of the desirable features of this pistol remained unchanged. The slide is stainless steel with a Nitron finish. There are very functional cocking serrations front and rear on the slide. The extractor is external, and other controls are large enough to be easily activated while being small enough to stay out of the way. X-RAY 3 Day/Night sights are standard issue. The front sight is not fiber optic but is still very visible. The sight body contains a tritium lamp that glows green in the dark. The lamp is surrounded by a green plastic insert that our tests showed to be very visible in the sunlight. The rear sight also has two tritium lamps in a metal body that can be used as a flat surface suitable for slide manipulation in an emergency.

The slide is milled out to allow the mounting of a red-dot sight. The cover for that milled slot is attached by two screws accessible from the bottom of the slide. When those two screws are removed, the cover-plate comes off, along with the rear sight, as two separate units. Please note the installation of a red-dot sight requires the removal of the rear sight. If you mount a red dot on the P365XL, you will not have a dedicated rear sight. The Shield RMSc has a cut in the rear of the sight body that allows a rear sight/front sight to co-witness while the red dot is installed. This same slot can also serve as an emergency rear sight. We tested the effectiveness of the slot and it worked fine at 7 yards, but not as well as the standard rear sight.

There were a few more improvements we really like. The first was changing the curved trigger to a flat trigger like those used in SIG P320X models. The geometry of the flat trigger creates an almost vertical break point for the sear release and gives the shooter



We deployed four great types of self-defense ammunition from Black Hills, Speer, and SIG Sauer. For the combat shooting, we used the affordable Remington UMC FMJs.

a bit more leverage. We found both of those points to aid our shooting with this pistol. Next was the slight lengthening of the grip frame. A majority of people should now be able to get most of three fingers on the grip, which also helps in controlling the pistol under recoil. Like many other polymer-framed pistols, the magazine well on the P365XL is beveled to help the rapid insertion of a new magazine. The P365XL goes beyond that point and actually flares the magwell to make an even bigger opening. Our calipers show this only added a very acceptable 0.1 inch to the width of the pistol. This is still a very thin firearm. Though one of our very few complaints is that it is thin to the point where a Picatinny rail would not work with the design. A proprietary rail is on the forend, but that can limit available accessories.

Every illuminated sight will be used in widely varying circumstances and differing amounts of ambient light. Changes in available light on the target change the amount of light throughput required from the sight. The bright light that is required to see the dot in direct sunlight will almost blind the shooter trying to use that sight later in the evening. Dot sights have to adjust the amount of light thrown on the glass. One of the ways to do this is manually by the shooter, which is fine in a competitive situation. That may not be so great for a defensive encounter. What if the shooter is moving from sunlight into a dimly lit room and doesn't have time to fiddle with the rheostat? The Shield RMSc senses the light available at the target and changes the beam intensity. The only problem we really noticed with the programming was when we would stand in a lighted area and point the sight at a more dimly lit target. The beam did not get dim enough and bloomed a little bit on the target. We could still see to hit the targets just fine.

Our Team Said: The SIG P365XL did almost everything well. It functioned every shot, first try. Accuracy was excellent, with its average group only being .06 inch larger than the winning

WALTHER PPS M2 2805961 9MM LUGER, \$649
GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

For those who like smaller pistols with grips that will not abrade tender hands too much, this could be the choice for you.



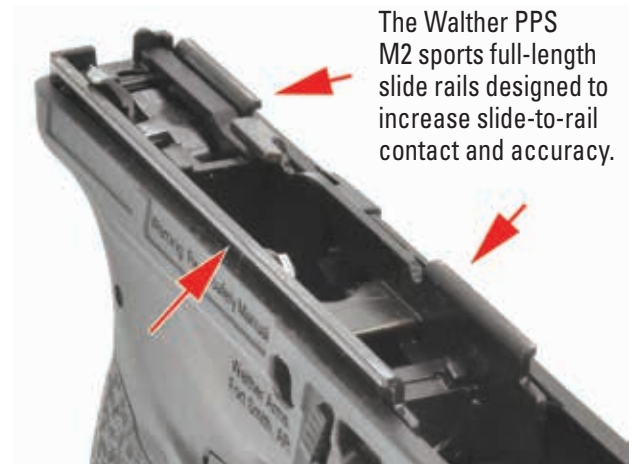
Action Type..... Semi auto, striker fired
Overall Length.....6.31 in.
Overall Height.....4.81 in. with red-dot sight
Maximum Width.....1.04 in.
Weight Unloaded (no magazine)..... 18.9 oz. w/red-dot sight
Weight Loaded (8 rounds)..... 24.7 oz.

Slide Material..... Steel, Tenifer coated
Slide Retraction Effort..... 19.1 lbs.
Receiver Material..... Polymer
Finish..... Black
Front Strap Height..... 1.5 in.
Back Strap Height.....2.75 in.
Barrel Length.....3.2 in.
Grip Thickness (Maximum)..... 1.04 in.
Grip Circumference.....5.3 in.
Magazine.....(1) 6-round flush-fit magazine & (1) 7-round extended
Rear Sight..... Steel with white dots, drift adjustable
Front Sight.....Steel with white dot
Sight Radius.....5.4 in.
Trigger Pull Weight.....4.9 lbs.
Trigger Span.....2.8 in.
Safety..... Trigger blade, hammer block
Warranty..... Limited lifetime
Telephone.....(479) 242-8500
Website..... WaltherArms.com
Made In..... Germany



The extra attention to detail on the Walther, S&W Shield, and Springfield Armory Hellcat are very evident. Less visible is the polished feed ramp shown on the Walther.

The Walther presents very visible iron sights, and the front sight can be changed out to provide a different height and point of impact.



The Walther PPS M2 sports full-length slide rails designed to increase slide-to-rail contact and accuracy.



The Walther trigger and controls remind us of those on a Glock.

HANDGUN COMPARISON

VALUE GUIDE: 9MM LUGER HANDGUN RANKINGS			
GUN NAME	ISSUE	GRADE	COMMENTS
Arex Rex Delta REXDELTA-01 9mm Luger, \$425	Feb. 2020	A	Best Buy. Reliability and practical accuracy are good, and the pistol is the right size for concealed carry.
Stoeger Industries STR-9 31721 9mm Luger, \$350	Feb. 2020	B	If you like the Glock 17, you will like the STR-9. Worth the money, but it is not our favorite.
Ruger Security-9 Compact Model 3818 9mm Luger, \$309	Feb. 2020	B	The pistol is adequate for the task and will not break the bank.
SIG P365 Nitron Micro-Compact 9mm Luger, \$465	Feb. 2020	B	The SIG costs more than the Ruger Security-9 without overwhelming advantages.
S&W M2.0 PC Shield 11787 9mm Luger, \$430	Jan. 2020	A	Best Buy. Smooth and accurate, great sights and trigger. Costs a lot less than the SIG.
SIG Sauer P365XL P365XL-9-BXR3 9mm Luger, \$580	Jan. 2020	A	Our Pick. The SIG P365XL was the most accurate of the four pistols tested.
Springfield Armory XDE9 XDE9389B 9mm Luger, \$460	Jan. 2020	A	Slide is easier to retract, hammer-fired, DA/SA trigger set the XDE apart in this test.
Springfield Hellcat Micro-Compact 9mm Luger, \$500	Jan. 2020	F/A	Hellcat #1 failed when the trigger wouldn't reset (F). Hellcat #2 worked perfectly (A). Best accuracy.
Glock 43X Ameriglo Night Sights PX435SL301AB 9mm Luger, \$542	July 2019	A	Our Pick. Firing grip is superior to the G43 and allows better shooting with little compromise.
Glock 48 PA485SL301AB 9mm Luger, \$488	July 2019	A	Best-shooting pistol in the test and the most powerful. Minimally more difficult to conceal.
Mossberg MC1sc 89001 9mm Luger, \$365	July 2019	A-	Best Buy. The Mossberg 9mm gave up little to the Glock designs. Reliability was never a question.
Springfield XD(M) 4.5 9mm Luger XDMT9459FDEHCE TB, \$505	Apr. 2019	A	Our Pick as a personal-defense, home-defense, and tactical pistol.
Glock G34 Gen5 MOS PA3430103MOS 9mm Luger, \$710	Apr. 2019	A	The Gen5 guns are the best yet, with superior accuracy and features over earlier Glocks.
CZ-USA CZ P0-9 91620 9mm Luger, \$402	Apr. 2019	B	Best Buy. CZ has managed to pack a lot of value into the P0-9. 19-round magazine.
FNH FNS-9L Longslide 66725 9mm Luger, \$570	Apr. 2019	B	Heavier trigger than the other pistols. Accuracy wasn't as good.
Glock 45 9mm Luger, \$546	Jan. 2019	A	Fast from concealed carry. The action allows a trained shooter to make fast hits. Reliable.
Beretta APX Compact JAXC921 9mm Luger, \$449	Jan. 2019	B	Magazines were difficult to load. Slide was difficult to rack. Takedown button too tight.
SIG P320-M17 320F-9-M17-MS 9mm Luger, \$770	Jan. 2019	B	The grip fits most hands well and the sights are excellent. The DAO trigger was too heavy.
Beretta 92 FS JS92F300M 9mm Luger, \$562	Jan. 2019	B	Shows the age of its design with a slide-mounted decocker and long DA trigger pull.
Taurus G2S 1-G2S931 9mm Luger, \$204	Nov. 2018	A	Best Buy. The Taurus pistol was reliable and controllable in rapid fire.

VALUE GUIDE: 9MM LUGER HANDGUN RANKINGS

GUN NAME	ISSUE	GRADE	COMMENTS
Smith & Wesson M&P9 Shield SW180021BW 9mm Luger, \$400	Nov. 2018	A	The Battleworn Shield is reliable, accurate enough, and compact enough for EDC.
Bersa BP9MCC 9mm Luger, \$295	Nov. 2018	A-	Reliable, feels good in the hand, and offers excellent handling in fast-paced drills.
Honor Defense Honor Guard HG9SCF FIST 9mm Luger, \$400	Nov. 2018	A-	The FIST option is viable. We tested it against barricades with excellent results.
Ruger EC9s 3283 9mm Luger, \$231	Nov. 2018	B-	Most accurate handgun of the test, despite its light weight.
Smith & Wesson M&P9 M2.0 Compact 11686 9mm Luger, \$476	June 2018	A	Pleasing trigger action, good gripping surface, a rail, and grip inserts.
Glock G19X G5 PX1950703 9mm Luger, \$594	June 2018	A-	Has many of the good features of the Gen5s. Fast from leather, fast on target, reliable.
Ruger SR1911 L'wt Commander 6722 9mm Luger, \$739	June 2018	B	For those who like the single-action 1911 cocked-and-locked, this is a good choice.
SIG Sauer P225-A1 Nitron 225A-9-BSS-C 9mm Luger, \$880	June 2018	B-	Slim grip appeals to shooters with small hands. No rail and low magazine capacity.
Glock 17 Gen5 9mm Luger, \$545	Mar. 2018	B-	A credible firearm, but the sum of its parts is not a great leap forward.
CZ-USA CZ P-10 C 91520 9mm Luger, \$480	Feb. 2018	A-	Best Buy. Well-designed sights, decent trigger, ambi slide lock and magazine catch.
Lipsey's Glock 17RTF2 Vickers FDE 9mm Luger, \$630	Feb. 2018	A-	Our Pick. Includes Vickers Tactical sights, a mag guide, and mag basepads.
Beretta 92FS W/Wilson Combat Upgrades 9mm Luger, \$550	Feb. 2018	B	Smooth, well finished, and the most accurate handgun tested. Grip did not fit all shooters.
Arex Rex Zero 1 Standard FDE 9mm Luger, \$634	Feb. 2018	B	Fit, finish, and an absence of internal tool marks show high build standards.
Smith & Wesson M&P9 M2.0 11537 9mm Luger, \$599	Dec. 2017	A	A refined striker-fire pistol with a crisp trigger, excellent grips, and good accuracy.
Springfield Armory XD MOD.2 4-In. Service 9mm Luger, \$565	Dec. 2017	A-	Easy to shoot due to the fiber-optic front sight, textured grip, and consistent trigger.
Ruger American Pro Duty 8605 9mm Luger, \$579	Dec. 2017	B+	The American is capable and ran well with good accuracy. Grip inserts gave trouble.
Kimber Micro 9 Desert Tan (LG) 3300168 9mm Luger, \$659	Oct. 2017	A	The laser grip complements the large sights on this micro pistol.
SIG Sauer P938 Emperor Scorpion 9mm Luger, \$639	Oct. 2017	A	With large sights, a crisp trigger and toothy grips, this was easy to shoot and control.
Springfield Armory XDE 3.3 XDE9339BE 9mm Luger, \$519	Oct. 2017	B	Trigger geometry took some getting used to. Decocker was hard to manipulate.
Walther PPS M2 2805961 9mm Luger, \$451	Sept. 2017	A	The Walther PPS M2 is a class act. It was the most expensive pistol tested this month.

HANDGUN COMPARISON

Hellcat. Speed and accuracy on the drills was outstanding, with the P365XL winning two of the four drills and coming in second place on the other two. Our group of testers preferred the P365XL's trigger. But we did not like having to remove the rear sight to mount the optic. We shot a 15-yard drill with five shots from the low ready. We did the drill once with the iron sights and then again utilizing the red dot sight. The SIG P365XL does not maintain its rear sight with the optic attached, so we had to use the channel provided on the Shield RMSc sight. The SIG posted the slowest time on this drill without the red dot and the fastest time with it. We've seen too many things go wrong and would prefer to have that rear sight.

Walther PPS M2 2805961 9mm Luger, \$649

The PPS M2 is one of the newer creations from Carl Walther in Germany and is imported by Walther Arms, Inc. in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. As the designer and manufacturer of the famous PPK, Walther knows a thing or two about concealment pistols. This latest iteration is also small and sleek, but a far cry from the look of the iconic pistol carried by Sean Connery in the early James Bond movies. The PPS M2 was released in 2016 as an update to the PPS. We noted several interesting changes. First, no Picatinny rail, which probably isn't that big a deal on a pistol truly designed for concealment. Second, no more extended slide stop. Last, and hallelujah, they got rid of the paddle-style magazine release and adopted a true, American-style release located behind the trigger. The Walther comes with a flush-fit six-round magazine and an extended seven-round mag. The molded-in grip texture is not as aggressive as we like, but that is a personal preference. The grip frame had a slight curve to the back strap and pointed well for us.

Without the red dot we have on our sample, we would liken the pistol most closely to a Glock 43, and the Glock influence is very obvious. The trigger has the same look, feel, and blade-type safety of a Glock. If you are familiar with the internals of a Glock and look at the trigger components of the PPS M2, you are going to feel right at home. The pistol disassembles using the same twin tabs on either side of the slide. There is a difference in the takedown versus the Glock in that while the trigger has to be pressed before the slide comes off, that action is taken after the tabs have been pulled down and the slide has started forward. Another big difference is the steel insert inside the frame. Most polymer-framed pistols seem to have minimal contact between the slide and the metal frame. The slide frequently rides on small tabs located fore and aft as well as on either side of the frame. The rails on the PPS M2 occupy the entire right side of the steel frame along with two approximately 1-inch-long rails on the left side. Old 1911 shooters preach solid slide-to-rail contact. Walther says it improves accuracy. We checked it out for you.

The slide and metal parts are Tenifer treated, which



Clockwise from top left are the S&W Shield, the SIG P365XL, the Walther PPS M2, and the Springfield Hellcat. The controls on these pistols are simple. All four have protected magazine-release buttons and recessed slide-release levers. The slides can all be grasped easily for quick removal. The SIG is obviously taller than the others through the grip area. The Hellcat is the only one that can fit in a pocket with the red dot on.

is a ferritic nitrocarburizing process also used on Glock pistols. There are cocking serrations located front and rear. They were sharp enough to be useful without being so sharp as to cut up our hands. There is a cocking indicator located in the rear of the slide, which puzzles us a bit. When uncocked, the indicator is forward, inside the slide. When the slide is operated, partially cocking the striker, the indicator comes flush with the rear of the slide. As the trigger is compressed, thus fully cocking the trigger prior to sear release, the indicator extends from the rear of the slide. We would like to see the indicator protrude far enough out from the rear of the slide to allow a tactile check without having to compress the trigger further. The pistol has steel front and rear sights, showing the familiar three-dot pattern. The rear sight is drift adjustable for windage. The front sight has a mounting screw, and the manual says that various-height sights are available as an accessory from Walther. They should be very easy to swap out and change vertical point of impact. The slide is milled for the Shield sight, which is held in place by two solid screws. The sight's location on the slide allowed the rear sights to stay on the pistol when the red dot was mounted, and we really liked that.

Our Team Said: The Walther PPS M2 functioned perfectly through all tests and drills. The PPS wound up in second place in our accuracy tests, losing on average group size by a mere .03 inch. Maybe those long rails really do matter.

Written and photographed by Joe Woolley, using evaluations from GUN TESTS team testers. GT

Replicas of Famous Firearms, Part 2: Take a Pass on ISSC

The SCAR-type rimfire had fit-and-finish and function problems. Anschütz's RX22 SCAR was better, but not great. Some might like the Walther HK, but for a winner, pick the S&W M&P 15-22.

In part one of our tests of eight 22 LR firearms that resemble famous battle rifles, we examined the Carl Walther HK MP5 A5, the Chiappa Arms M1 Carbine, the Carl Walther Colt M4, and GSG's StG44. Now we'll review the second set, which includes Anschütz's MSR RX22 SCAR along with the very similar ISSC SCAR, the Walther Arms HK416 D145RS, and Smith & Wesson's M&P 15-22. As in part one, we wanted to see which rifles were truest to the original arms while being practical and fun.

Our test group consisted of men and women shooters of varying stature, experience and skill. They evaluated the guns for fit, finish, reliability, ease of use, practical accuracy, and fun. For the plinking evaluation, we shot outdoors at a 12-by-18-inch oval steel gong placed 50 yards from the firing line. Some testing days were hot and some were cold, so we think

we have a good idea how these rifles will perform in everyday conditions.

Formal accuracy testing was performed at Boyert Shooting Center (Boyert.com) in Katy, Texas, where we fired five five-round groups at 25 yards from a bench. Because we expect these rifles to be purchased and used as fun plinkers, we tested using three different kinds of economy bulk ammunition: Aguila 40-grain round nose, Federal 36-grain round nose, and

Our second set of battle-rifle rimfire knockoffs included (top row, left to right) Anschütz's MSR RX22 SCAR and Smith & Wesson's M&P 15-22. Bottom row, left, is the Walther Arms HK416 D145RS. Bottom row right is the receiver of the ISSC SCAR, which had both visible finish problems (arrow) and function issues. We wouldn't buy it.



SPECIALTY FIREARMS

Winchester white box 40-grain hollow points. None of these loads would qualify as expensive target loads, so it is likely that each rifle would be more accurate with a preferred target load. While each rifle showed ammunition preferences for reliability and accuracy, velocities were reasonably consistent across the different rifles for each brand of ammunition.

By the time we completed testing, each of these rifles had been stress-tested with several hundreds of rounds put through each of them without cleaning. Since 22s tend to be shot a lot, this testing protocol was consistent with a heavy shooting day at the range for family and friends or a moderate training day. Let us see which rifles proved to be reliable and fun while also being true to the original firearms.

Anschütz MSR RX22 22LR, \$800-\$1000

The Anschütz RX22 is not what we usually think of when we think Anschütz. Not a classic target rifle, the Anschütz RX22 is a 22 LR replica of the FN SCAR. In service in approximately 20 countries, the SCAR (Special Operations Forces Combat Assault Rifle) was designed in response to a 2004 Special Operations Command (SOCOM) competition for a modular assault-rifle platform with advanced ergonomics that could fire both the 5.56 NATO and 7.62 NATO cartridges. Built in South Carolina, FN created two variants: the MK16 SCAR-L (light in 5.56) and MK17 SCAR-H (heavy in 7.62). The SCAR-H can be converted to use either caliber with a variety of barrel lengths. Weighing between 6.7 and 8.2 pounds (depending upon configuration), the SCAR is a piston-driven gas-operated short-recoil, select-fire weapon. The stock can be folded to the right side due to the piston-driven design. The brass deflector on the right side of the receiver locks the stock in place. The two-part receiver has an aluminum upper and a polymer lower. The SCAR has Picatinny rails at the 12, 3, 6 and 9 o'clock positions, with the top rail extending the full length of the action. The rail can accept any MIL-STD-1913 optic or accessory. The rifle comes with an M16 compatible pistol grip and an extendable buttstock.

The magazine well is flared, and there is raised fencing around the safety and magazine release. The SCAR uses a proprietary 30-round magazine that is not M16/STANAG compatible. The SCAR-L was initially deployed in 2009 by the U.S. Army's 75th Ranger Regiment. The SCAR-L only saw service for a year and was cancelled, primarily for financial reasons. Several variants of the SCAR-H remain in limited service with U.S. Special Forces. While not a movie star like some of the rifles in our previous article, the SCAR is featured in several video games and was therefore of interest to the gamers in our

Manufacturer	Walther Arms HK416 D145RS 578.03.01 22 LR, \$583
Action Type	Blowback semi-auto, aluminum lower, aluminum upper, black paint
Overall Length	32.7 to 38.0 in.
Overall Height w/o Scope	11.4 in.
Maximum Width	3.0 in.
Weight Unloaded	6.5 lbs.
Magazine Capacity	20; plastic box with thumb assist
Barrel	16.1 in. long; black carbon steel
Buttstock	AR-15 style retracting; aluminum and plastic; black rubber buttplate
Stock Length of Pull	11.625 to 15.125 in.
Fore-end	Aluminum quad rails
Trigger	8.5 lbs.; single stage
Safety Style	HK416
Magazine Release Style	AR-15-style button
Front Sight	Hooded post, elevation adj.
Rear Sight	Drum, elevation and windage adj.
Sight Radius	13.0 in.
Receiver Optic Treatment	Full Picatinny rail
Warranty	1 year, limited
Telephone	(479) 646-4210
Website	WaltherArms.com
Country of Manufacture	Germany



The RX22's two-part receiver has an aluminum upper and a polymer lower. Top arrow: The top rail extends the full length of the action. The rail can accept any MIL-STD-1913 optic or accessory. Middle arrow: The brass deflector also locks the side-folding stock in place. The rifle comes with an M16-compatible pistol grip and an extendable buttstock. Bottom arrow: There is raised fencing around the magazine release.

**Anschütz MSR
RX22 22 LR, \$800-\$1000**

Blowback semi-auto,
aluminum upper, polymer lower
32.4 to 33.9 in.
7.9 in.
1.4 in.
6.94 lbs.
10, 22; plastic box
with thumb assist
16.5 in. long; 1:16.5 twist;
black carbon steel

Black polymer, 2-position comb,
3-position length; rubber buttplate

12.5 to 14.125 in.
Aluminum quad rail
4.7 lbs.; two stage
2 position, safe down,
ambidextrous
Button, ambidextrous
Post with dot; elevation adj.

Peep, two dot;
elevation and windage adj.
16.9 in.

Picatinny rail
2 year, limited
(205) 655-7500
AnschützNorthAmerica.com
Austria

**ISSC MK22
ISSC211000 22 LR, \$270**

Blowback semi-auto,
aluminum upper, polymer lower
32.4 to 33.9 in.
7.9 in.
1.4 in.
6.94 lbs.
10, 22; plastic box
with thumb assist
16.5 in. long; 1:16.5 twist;
black carbon steel

Black polymer, 2-position comb,
3-position length; rubber buttplate

12.375 to 13.875 in.
Aluminum quad rail
5.7 lbs.; two stage
2 position, safe down,
ambidextrous
Button, ambidextrous
Post with dot; elevation adj.

Peep, two dot;
elevation and windage adj.
16.9 in.

Picatinny rail
None
(205) 655-7500
NA
Austria

**Smith & Wesson
M&P 15-22 22 LR, \$500**

Blowback semi-auto,
polymer upper and lower
30.5 to 33.8 in.
9.0 in.
2.3 in.
5.5 in.
10, 25; plastic box
with thumb assist
16.5 in. long; 1:15 twist;
black Armornite carbon steel;
birdcage flash hider
Black polymer, 6-position CAR;
serrated plastic buttplate

11.0 to 14.25 in.
Polymer quad rail
6.3 lbs., single stage
2 position
Button
Detachable front post;
elevation and windage adj.

Peep, 2 aperture flip style;
elevation and windage adj.
17.75 in.

Picatinny rail
Limited lifetime
(800) 331-0852
Smith-Wesson.com
USA

testing group. Other testers were looking forward to trying out the clone of one of the most modern assault rifles on the market.

Made in Austria, the Anschütz RX22 is practically a twin of the SCAR. With a smooth black finish and black furniture, the RX22 at 6.9 pounds was even the same weight as the MK16 SCAR-L. Like the SCAR, the buttstock folds to the right, extends, and includes an adjustable comb. Despite all this flexibility, not one tester found this rifle to be comfortable with the provided pop-up open sights. Additionally, the rubber buttpad kept falling off the rifle.

The sights were interesting. When folded, they looked like standard three-dot pistol sights. When raised up, they had a front post and a rear peep sight. The front post was adjustable for elevation, and the rear sight was adjustable for windage. The rifle might be more comfortable with a scope, but we tested each of the rifles as they came out of the box with open sights.

While the ejection port is on the right-hand side, the bolt handle can be installed on either side of the action. This was a popular feature with our testers



**Walther Arms HK416
D145RS 578.03.01 22 LR, \$583**



**ISSC MK22
ISSC211000 22 LR, \$270**



**Anschütz MSR
RX22 22 LR, \$900**



**Smith & Wesson
M&P 15-22 22 LR, \$500**

SPECIALTY FIREARMS

who preferred to use their left hand to rack the bolt. One of the testers found the bolt difficult to pull all the way back.

The 22-round magazines (available several places for \$30) loaded very easily and dropped freely. The magazine release is ambidextrous. The bolt locks back when empty and stays locked after you drop the magazine. This is a nice feature in a rimfire because it reduces the amount of dry firing (which can theoretically damage the chamber or firing pin over time). The safety lever indicates Fire in the up position. Some of the testers found it a little difficult to flick the safety up to Fire, but placing the rifle on Safe was very easy. The two-stage trigger is user adjustable and averaged a light 4.7 pounds. However, the RX22's trigger showed that weight isn't everything because it had a gritty take-up, spongy release, and lots of overtravel.

To clean the rifle, the user must turn the rifle over, remove two screws and their bolts, and then remove the grip section. At this point the action, chamber, and barrel can be cleaned from the breech with a flexible rod or cleaning rope. Anschütz does not recommend any further disassembly to clean the rifle.

Regarding the stock, none of the testers found it easy to get a consistent cheek weld. Our more petite shooters thought the rifle was a little too heavy to keep steady during for extended off-hand shooting.

The 16.5-inch barrel is made by Anschütz, so we would expect it to be accurate. Despite the lackluster trigger, in formal accuracy testing the RX22 proved fairly accurate with ammunition it liked. While the Winchester 32-grain hollow points averaged a mediocre 1.5 inches, both of the 40-grain roundnoses averaged 1.0 inches. The Federal was incredibly consistent, with all groups within 0.1 inch in size. When plinking, the rifle usually hit the 50-yard gong, but the trigger threw off a few rounds. Some testers thought that the RX22 would likely be a tack driver with match ammo and a cleaner trigger.

The RX22 was adequately reliable. We experienced one failure to feed with the Winchester and one failure to fire with the Aguila. Since we observed a good firing-pin indentation, the failure to fire was almost certainly an ammunition failure and not a failure of the rifle. Because no other failures occurred, the testers expressed no significant concerns regarding the Anschütz's reliability. However, we are concerned about the Anschütz's availability. The Anschütz did not stay on the market very long and is no longer available brand new. When new, the RX22 had a MSRP of \$900. You can sometimes find them used for \$800-\$1000.

Our Team Said: While the RX22 rifle was accurate, other rifles in the test performed as well or better. The trigger was sub-par, the buttpad kept falling off, and no tester was able to

22 LR RANGE DATA

Aguila 40-grain Round Nose	Walther Arms HK416	Anschütz RX22	ISSC MK22	Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22
Average Velocity	1110 fps	1164 fps	1151 fps	1066 fps
Muzzle Energy	109 ft.-lbs.	120 ft.-lbs.	115 ft.-lbs.	101 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	0.9 in.	0.7 in.	N/A in.	0.5 in.
Average Group	1.1 in.	1.0 in.	N/A in.	0.9 in.
Federal 40-grain Round Nose	Walther Arms HK416	Anschütz RX22	ISSC MK22	Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22
Average Velocity	1130 fps	1170 fps	1184 fps	1105 fps
Muzzle Energy	113 ft.-lbs.	122 ft.-lbs.	124 ft.-lbs.	108 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.2 in.	0.9 in.	0.6 in.	0.9 in.
Average Group	1.4 in.	1.0 in.	0.9 in.	1.0 in.
Winchester 36-grain Hollow Point	Walther Arms HK416	Anschütz RX22	ISSC MK22	Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22
Average Velocity	1251 fps	1263 fps	1256 fps	1242 fps
Muzzle Energy	124 ft.-lbs.	127 ft.-lbs.	126 ft.-lbs.	123 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.0 in.	0.9 in.	0.8 in.	0.6 in.
Average Group	1.3 in.	1.5 in.	1.3 in.	0.8 in.

We averaged the results from five five-shot groups for accuracy. We recorded velocity with a Magnaspeed V3 Chronograph (SKU 628777, MidwayUSA.com, \$380) at the muzzle. Temperature at the time of testing ranged from 70 to 75 degrees. All groups were fired indoors at 25 yards from a bench with a sandbag. Location: Boyert Shooting Centers in Katy, Texas (Boyert.com). Ammo source: Academy Sports and Outdoors.

The Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22 shot the Aguila rounds pretty well, averaging 0.9-inch average groups at 25 yards. The Winchesters were a little better.



The Anschütz MSR RX22 was accurate and reliable with the Aguila rounds, shooting 1.0-inch average groups at 25 yards.



The Walther HK416 was very accurate and reliable with the Aguila ammunition, shooting 1.1-inch average groups at 25 yards.



The ISSC MK22 was accurate with the Federal ammunition, shooting 0.9-inch average groups at 25 yards, as shown. But the gun wouldn't shoot the Winchester bullets.



get comfortable with the rifle and its open sights. None of the testers thought the RX22 was worth the money and said they would look elsewhere.

ISSC MK22 ISSC211000 22 LR, \$270

If you're looking for a SCAR and the RX22 doesn't suit your fancy, another company imports a SCAR replica in 22 LR. Let's see what our testers thought of it.

The ISSC MK22 appears to be a clone of the Anschütz RX22. With an MSRP of \$665, the MK22 could be found at CDNN Sports (CDNNSports.com) on sale for \$300. The rifle has the same weight, configuration and controls as the RX22. While our rifle at first seemed to have the same black finish as the RX22, the ISSC MK22 finish quickly started to bubble and peel off in multiple locations.

Our testers had the same complaints about the rifle's comfort with open sights. While the butt pad stayed on the rifle, the base plate of the pistol grip came off a couple of times. Interestingly, while the RX22 would fire without the magazine, the ISSC MK22 would not fire without a magazine. Some of the testers thought this was a good feature in a training rifle. The magazines are identical for both rifles. They are easy to load, drop freely, and hold the bolt open when empty. Some of our testers found the magazine difficult to reload as it would not also seat or lock in very well.

The bolt on our example was mounted on the left side. Some of our testers liked that because it allowed the off hand to manipulate the bolt without altering the firing grip. You can transfer the bolt handle to the other side if that is your preference. The safety was easier to use on the MK22 than the RX22. The trigger

on the ISSC was actually judged to be superior to the Anschütz. While slightly heavier at 5.9 pounds and demonstrating the same spongy release and excessive overtravel, the two-stage trigger was easier to use, with much lighter take-up.

Formal accuracy testing proved to be a great challenge. The ISSC MK22 frequently experienced failures to feed and extract. Since we had the same results with three different magazines and all three brands of ammo, the testers concluded that the fault was with our rifle. The fact that none of the magazines would seat or lock up securely might indicate an issue with the magazine interface on our particular rifle. However, further research indicated that these problems are common with the model. In fact, the only brand of ammo we were able to get to work consistently enough to reliably test was the Federal



The ISSC MK22's finish quickly started to bubble and peel off in multiple locations.

SPECIALTY FIREARMS

40-grain roundnose. We eventually squeezed out three groups that averaged a solid 0.9 inch. Two other groups were larger, but were disqualified due to functional difficulties. We only got two groups out of the Winchester 36-grain hollow points: one was 1.71 inches and the other was 0.82 inches. We never were able to produce a group out of our rifle with the Aguila 40-grain roundnose. Bottom line is that our example of the ISSC MK22 was not able to meet our testing protocols.

Our Team Said: Despite hope that we would find a quality SCAR replica, our testers found very little to like about the ISSC MK22. There were problems with the fit (pistol grip), finish, and reliability. The ISSC MK22 got one tester so angry that she said she would not pay a dollar for it. The frustration was real and prevented anyone from having any fun with the rifle. If a rifle like this isn't fun, then it simply is not worth buying.

Walther Arms HK416 D145RS 578.03.01 22 LR, \$583

Our next rifle mimics the Heckler & Koch HK416 (M27). While similar to the AR-15 in appearance, not everything is cross compatible between the two rifles. In particular, there are some significant differences found within the upper receiver of the HK416. Rather than using Eugene Stoner's direct-gas-impingement system, the HK416 was designed from the outset to use a proprietary short-stroke gas-piston system derived from the one used in the company's G36 assault rifle. (The G36 was accepted by the German army in 1997 as a replacement for the G3 main battle rifle.) While many piston systems have proven to be unreliable in the AR platform, the HK system has shown itself to be robust. Used in more than 25 countries, the HK416 has been the standard assault rifle for the Norwegian armed forces since 2008. Reliability has been good with proper maintenance and ammunition in locations as diverse as Norway and Afghanistan. One issue that cropped up on the earlier rifles was U.S.-sized pin holes being slightly too large for European-spec pins. This issue was corrected. The few remaining problems could mostly be attributed to improper field maintenance and "environmentally friendly" types of ammunition. NATO-standard ammunition doesn't seem to be causing issues. The HK416 was famously used by the Navy SEALs during the bin Laden raid. In 2017, the HK416 was selected by the French to replace their FAMAS rifle. In late 2017, the U.S. Marine Corps selected the HK416 to be the M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle to be issued to every infantry squad in the Corps. With this increasing usage across the world, it is only natural that a 22 LR replica of the M27 could become a popular item.

Like many other military replicas, our HK416D in 22 LR is manufactured by Carl Walther of Germany. It arrived in a sturdy cardboard box and came with two 20-round polymer magazines. The 416D is a typical blowback action rather than the piston found



Our Walther HK416D weighed 6.5 pounds, light enough for all our testers to handle it easily.

in the M27. While a little scarce, they are still in production and are available new for around \$350 at a variety of stores, including Guncommanders.com. Accessories are available at many places and are reasonably priced. Even though the HK website states that the 416D only weighs 5.7 pounds, we found that our example actually weighed 6.5 pounds. This is about half a pound lighter than the M27. The M4-style barrel is 16.1 inches long compared to the M27's 16.5 inches and is tipped with a birdcage flash hider. The HK416D has a retractable stock that allows an overall length between 30.2 and 34.5 inches. This is also a little shorter than an M27. The reduced weight and size makes this rifle friendlier to smaller shooters, though some of our shooters thought the rifle was a little too front heavy for their taste. While the buttstock is made of a sturdy polymer, many of our testers did not think the adjustment mechanism was intuitive. They preferred the standard CAR-style collapsible stock found on other rifles. The stock did provide a comfortable non-slip butt pad and a very good cheek weld.

The 416D pistol grip was a hard plastic and had a handy compartment with a cover that securely latched. While it could hold batteries, we would probably keep a rope-style cleaning kit and small bottle of solvent in the pistol grip. The forearm was aluminum and came with quad Picatinny rails. The rifle had multiple places to attach a sling.

Finish on the firearm was even and has held up fairly well to heavy usage. The receiver splits at the rear, which allows for cleaning the barrel from the breech. Because 22 LR is often dirty ammunition, this is a definite plus for the 416D. We recommend you follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding lubrication. Too much oil can cause as many problems as insufficient oil.

The magazine well is flared, and the magazine-release button on the right side is easy to manipulate. The left-sided bolt release is non-functional, which limits the rifle somewhat as a training tool. The



The HK416D's M4-style barrel is 16.1 inches long and is tipped with a birdcage flash hider.



The Walther's retractable stock allows an overall length between 30.2 and 34.5 inches.

standard aluminum dust cover closes with a positive click and remains closed until the AR-style bolt-charging handle is pulled back. The brass deflector and bolt forward assist appear to be decorative. The left-sided safety is metal and had two positions. These positions were marked Safe (in white) and Fire (in red) and use the standard H&K pictographs. The safety had a positive click and feel when used.

The sights are metal and very similar to the classic HK setup, with very sturdy ears protecting the front post and a rotating drum for the rear sight. The rear-drum sight did not have the normal V slot, and the apertures only changed sizes and not elevation. Most testers found the sights very easy to use, though one user almost lined up on one of the protective wings instead of the front post during rapid-fire drills.

The single-stage trigger was a disappointment, averaging 8.5 pounds with a long and gritty take-up and a lot of over-travel. We were concerned that the trigger might affect accuracy.

At the range, testers looked forward to shooting the HK since it looked so much like the new Marine M27. In fact, the rifle looked so much like a M27 that other shooters on the firing line were surprised that the 416D was the 22 LR version and not in 5.56 NATO. The 20-round magazines were easy to load, with finger-assist buttons on either side of the magazine. The magazines were compact enough that shooting from the bench was slightly less difficult than a standard AR. Magazine changes were easy and they dropped freely, but the fake bolt release meant that the shooter had to pull the charging handle to load the rifle. This slowed things down and disturbed the shooting position.

The sights were clear, fast, and precise with the smaller apertures. The controls worked well and had a very positive feel to them, even with gloves. The HK regularly hit the 50-yard gong, but it required extra attention due to the poor trigger.

In formal accuracy testing, the 416D did not fare well. In fact, the 416D ended up being one of the least

accurate rifles in our test. The Federal 40-grain RN ammunition averaged the worst with 1.4-inch groups. The Winchester 36-grain HP load was only slightly behind, with an average of 1.3-inch groups, though the best group of 1.0 inch showed the rifle had some promise. The Aguila 40-grain RN was very consistent and performed the best, averaging 1.1-inch groups. For all ammo brands, it was common that many of the groups had a cluster with a shot or two that substantially opened up the groups. We suspect that the groups would have improved with a better trigger. If we owned the rifle, we would invest in a superior trigger. On the plus side, the 416D was refreshingly reliable with all three types of ammunition tested. In fact, we experienced no failures to function during either the evaluation shoots or the accuracy testing. This is unusually reliable performance for a semi-auto rimfire.

Our Team Said: Overall, the testers enjoyed shooting the Walther Arms adaptation of the HK 416D. While not the optimal training tool we had hoped for, we found the 416D to be compact, easy to use, and reliable. Indeed, the favorite word to describe the 416D was "solid." With an improved trigger, we might have raised the score to an "A." We can certainly recommend buying the 416D if you want a M27 replica. However, the poor trigger and mediocre accuracy prevented us from falling in love with the rifle.

Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22 22 LR, \$500

The last rifle we are testing is a replica of the U.S. M4 service carbine. The M4 is a shorter and lighter member of the M16 family of rifles first developed 60 years ago. The increasing mechanization of the U.S. armed forces and the deployment of forces in urban areas drove the demand for a more compact primary infantry weapon. Officially adopted in 1994, the M4 saw heavy usage during peacekeeping and anti-terrorist conflicts and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. By 2005, the M4 was the primary weapon for all forward-deployed Army forces. By 2015, the M4 was designated the primary weapon for the U.S.

SPECIALTY FIREARMS

Top: The S&W's flattop receiver came with removable back-up iron sights. The front-post sight is well protected by two ears and is adjustable for elevation. **Middle:** Our 15-22 has the older quad-rail edition fore end, but you can get brand-new rifles with the lighter Magpul M-Lok handguard. **Bottom:** The M&P 15-22 is a simple blowback-operated action inside black-polymer upper and lower receivers, which should be fine for the low-pressure 22 LR.



Marine Corps. The M4 carbine keeps the same 5.56 NATO chambering and magazine of the M16 rifle but has a telescoping stock and a 14.5-inch barrel with a shortened version of the direct impingement gas operating system developed by Eugene Stoner. The shorter DIG system tended to exhibit reliability issues in earlier carbines. As a result, the M4 was modified with two small ramps at the bottom of the chamber to improve feeding. The barrel includes a stepped section for the attachment of a M203 grenade launcher. A mature design, the M4 has been deployed in several variants to military and police in more than 60 countries. The M4 has a three-position selector for Safe, Semi-auto, and three-round burst fire. The M4A1 selector allows the user to select Safe, Semi-auto, or Full-auto modes. Almost all versions of the M4 have a flattop receiver allowing the use of optics and other accessories.

As the M4 is select fire and has a sub-16-inch barrel, ownership is regulated by the National Firearms Act (NFA) and requires a tax stamp for civilian ownership. Therefore, most civilian offerings are actually "M4 style" semi-automatic carbines with 16-inch barrels. Costing from \$500 and up, the M4-style rifle has proven to be just as popular with civilians as it has been with most troops and police. It makes sense that a less expensive 22 LR replica would be a very desirable for fun and training purposes.

The M&P (Military & Police) 15-22 replica M4 in 22 LR is built in the USA by Smith & Wesson of Springfield, Massachusetts. The M&P 15-22 is a simple blowback-operated action, as opposed to the direct impingement gas system found on the M4. The rifle has a 16.5-inch barrel and weighs a featherweight 5.4 pounds. This is due to the black polymer upper

and lower receivers. This material choice should not be an issue with the low-pressure 22 LR. In fact, the polymer may actually be an advantage due to ease of maintenance and a reduced risk of corrosion. We do recommend that some care be taken when selecting gun cleaners and lubricants to ensure they are polymer friendly. The sturdy receivers break down for cleaning in a similar manner to a standard M4. The upper receiver has a flattop Picatinny rail and integral brass deflector but no dust cover or forward assist. The lower receiver is clearly marked with the Smith & Wesson M&P logo. Our sample has the older quad-rail edition fore end, but you can get brand-new rifles with the even lighter Magpul M-Lok handguard for as little as \$329 (BudsGunShop.com). We are less enthusiastic about polymer for the quad rail. While we did not experience any issues with the material choice, we do recommend the user be careful not to over-tighten accessories on the quad rail. We can see the replacement Magpul M-lok handguard being an improvement in both longevity and reduced weight.

The M&P 15-22 uses a proprietary polymer magazine available in standard 25- and reduced 10-round capacities. Interestingly, the 10-round magazine comes in a standard-length body and a short-body version (which might be handy for shooting off a bench). The magazines are easily found and reasonably priced. The rifle comes with a standard six-position collapsible buttstock and finger-groove pistol grip. The M&P 15-22 controls closely mimic the M4 with a right-sided magazine release and left-sided two-position safety lever and bolt release. In fact, the M&P 15-22 is the only AR clone in our testing that has a functioning bolt release. This is a big plus if you want to use it for training purposes. All the controls were easily accessed while wearing gloves. The safety selector will only go on Safe when the rifle is cocked.

The flattop receiver came with removable back-up iron sights providing a 15.75-inch sight radius. The front-post sight is well protected by two ears and is adjustable for elevation. The well-protected rear peep sight had two apertures that are easily flipped. They are click adjustable for both elevation and windage. The sights were easy to use and should hold up well to rough service by shooters of all ages. The M&P 15-22 uses a standard AR-15 trigger group in a slightly enlarged housing. The rifle came with a serviceable single-stage trigger that had minimal take-up, a crisp release, and little overtravel. The trigger released at an average of 6.3 pounds.

As most of the testing panel had shot AR-15s before, they felt very familiar with the Smith & Wesson. Even the one tester with minimal AR experience found the controls intuitive. All the testers thought that the M&P 15-22 looked authentic. ARs have become so commonplace that nobody really noticed yet another one on the firing line. The testers thought the magazines were sturdy, but the thumb assists on

SPECIALTY FIREARMS



Trigger issues made us knock down the score of the Walther Arms HK416 D145RS 22 LR a notch. But if you're looking for an M27 clone, it's worth thinking about.

GUN TESTS GRADE: B

The ISSC MK22 showed ongoing failures to feed and extract. The blemes on the sides of the receiver put us off. There's just not much to like here, so we'd stay away.

GUN TESTS GRADE: F

The Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22 operated as we wanted and shot well. It won't break the bank.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

The Anschütz RX22's trigger wasn't the best, its butt pad fell off repeatedly, and no one liked its open sights. They're hard to find, expensive, and troubled. We'd pass.

GUN TESTS GRADE: C

either side of the magazine were a little small for easy loading. The magazines go into the well easily and latch with a positive click. The bolt is held open by the magazine when the rifle is empty. The experienced rimfire shooters like this because it should reduce wear on the firing pin and the chamber's edge due to dry firing.

The bolt stays open when the magazine is released. The magazines dropped freely. Because the bolt release is functional, the testers thought the M&P 15-22 was the best rifle for use as a training tool for magazine changes. The testers found the rifle easy to use in the cold with gloves. All our testers found the rifle easy to use from the standing position. The Smith & Wesson was easily the favorite of our younger and more petite shooters due to its balance, very light weight, and adjustable buttstock.

Practical accuracy with the M&P was excellent, with all testers scoring easy hits on the 50-foot gong using the peep sights. We shot more than 500 rounds through the rifle in both hot and cold conditions. Our testers experienced only one functional issue, a failure to eject very early in the evaluation process, during all of our testing.

While there have been substantiated claims of issues with early models of this rifle firing in an out-of-battery condition, we saw no evidence of that happening with our sample. At the time of this writing, Smith & Wesson has not issued any recalls for this product. Our advice is to always wear eye and ear protection and have any firearm exhibiting unsafe behavior seen by the manufacturer or a competent gunsmith.

The M&P 15-22 was easily the best rifle in our

formal 25-yard accuracy testing. The Federal 40-grain RN was the "worst," with a very consistent 1.0-inch average-size group. The Aguila 40-grain RN had the smallest group of the test at 0.5 inches and averaged 0.9-inch groups. The Winchester 36-grain HP tied for second smallest group in the test at 0.6 inches and the smallest average of 0.8-inch groups. The M&P 15-22 was remarkably consistent in accuracy testing, with the only flyers being called upon breaking the shot. The rifle is so accurate that installation of an AR-15 match trigger might be worth the investment. Our chronograph results indicated that the M&P velocities were a little lower for the Aguila and Federal ammunition than for the other rifles. The velocity differences were not considered a significant issue for this application.

Our Team Said: While not as exotic or as historically interesting as some of the other rifles, our testers really enjoyed shooting the Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22. Compact and lightweight, the rifle was comfortable for all our shooters to handle in a variety of positions, was very reliable, and was consistently accurate. Well balanced, the M&P 15-22 was easily the favorite of our most petite shooter. Our more experienced AR shooters said that the M&P 15-22 was the only rifle that could be considered a fully capable training tool. Half the price of a civilian M4 and shooting inexpensive 22 LR ammunition, this is a major selling point and a great help for economically improving one's shooting skills. As tested, we can fully recommend the Smith & Wesson M&P 15-22 as a realistic and reliable trainer and an accurate plinker that anyone can enjoy.

Written and photographed by David Tannahill, using evaluations from GUN TESTS team testers. GT

Tips for the Older Shooter

Aging shooters may have sight and hand-strength restrictions that make some firearms hard to use. Here, we offer a few choices that might make life easier for these folks.

We have heard from many GUN TESTS readers who have been shooting most of their life but find their chosen handguns, such as the Commander 45 ACP or midsized-frame 357 Magnum, are more difficult to control with the onset of aging and muscle loss. In the current firearms market, choosing a handgun can be a daunting proposition for anyone, but it is especially difficult for shooters with hand-strength or vision limitations.

But no one doubts the self-defense needs of older or disabled people. It is a sad fact of life that older shooters and those with some physical disability are among the most vulnerable to criminals. Often, seniors cannot run from trouble if they wanted to, and they have certain other physical limitations that affect their ability to handle weapons with vigor and accuracy. So finding a few guns suitable for these folks is an important consideration.

An older, or inexperienced, or disabled shooter still has to have a reliable sidearm, but beyond that must-have element, other factors come to the fore:

- Trigger action needs to be easier and smoother for seniors.
- The handgun should be physically easy to handle, so perhaps both the slide and the trigger need extra surface area to ensure this.
- Recoil should be minimized.
- Sighting options are important.

The older you are, maladies such as arthritis, carpal-tunnel syndrome, and injuries can come home to roost, affecting how you handle a firearm. Repetitive movement may become difficult. We talk about older shooters here as kind of a shorthand for a variety of people who may not be able to manipulate many common firearms, but the fact is, age isn't always an indicator of disability when it comes to firearms. Our raters for this article include a young-at-heart lady with arthritic hands. Another rater is a young woman beginning her shooting career, but who is at a disadvantage, she feels, due to very small hands. Older shooters may have more difficulty racking the slide of a self loader. They may also have more difficulty pressing the trigger of a double-action revolver, which often stacks.

Herewith, then, we offer a number of tips for the less-abled new-gun buyer and eliminate some bad choices, focusing on home defense and general shooting. Concealed carry will take care of itself with proper holster selection. We concentrated on compromises when the chosen firearm is becoming too much to



Above: Those with less visual acuity may find a red-dot sight to be a great aid in marksmanship. **Below:** For those having difficulty managing recoil, Hornady offers the Hornady Lite line.



handle. We considered changing ammunition first and then caliber to maintain proficiency, but with a little less horsepower hitting the target, and also less recoil. We also considered changing grips on some of the firearms to make the choice more useful. And if the user wanted to stick with a 1911 or a snubnose revolver, we investigated what new firearm in the same class may work a bit better than the one the shooter started with.

1911-Type Handguns

One of our raters carries a Commander chambered in 45 ACP and has done so for 40 years. He has a healed bullet pucker in his leg, a knife scar on his face, a recurring limp, and arthritis, although, he says, thank God, not much of it in his hands. His present carry gun is a SIG Fastback Nightmare Carry in 45 ACP. While he feels he handles the pistol well, a range



Our petite rater found the Citadel 9mm to be a great fit for her. She could manage a 45 Auto, but it wasn't ideal.

session of 50 rounds leaves his wrists sore. A few more rounds would be too much. Also, there is less range of motion in his shoulder due to stiffness, and perhaps the Commander doesn't clear leather as quickly as it once did. He has tried using a heavier recoil spring and switching to 185-grain rather than 230-grain loads to mitigate recoil. The result has not been satisfactory, although the results were incrementally helpful. The fact is, the 45 ACP's recoil is simply hard on the wrists.

There are several Officers Model 9mm 1911 types available, and this is what we suggested. While the Ruger or Kimber may have done as well, we had a Citadel 9mm on hand. It also fit the affordable category for an older shooter on a fixed budget. The shooter had everything he liked about the 1911 — a straight-to-the-rear trigger compression, a grip safety, a slide-lock safety, a low bore axis, and even Novak sights. Magazine capacity went up one round to nine rounds total. The shooter was given 200 rounds of Winchester 115-grain FMJ ammunition and four magazines. After firing the last round to slide lock, he had a smile on his face. The shooter remarked that recoil was light and the effect was not cumulative. He could have fired more. To finish up, he fired a magazine of Winchester 9mm Luger 124-grain PDX +Ps. No problems. The Citadel neatly solves the problems of recoil.

Also, it is lighter than the SIG Commander 45, yet kicks much less. Since it is shorter, it is also easier to draw from concealed carry. While there is a lessening in power placed on the target per shot, the shooter is well armed by any standard.

Our Team Said: For 1911-style handgunners, stepping down from 45 ACP to 38 Super or 9mm Luger or other lighter-recoiling cartridges may be an easy way to keep the platform they have known and loved for decades.

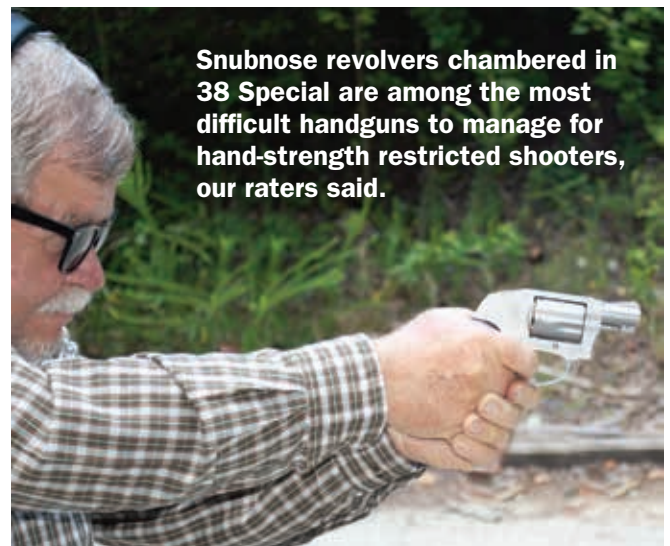
Snubnose 38 Special

Another rater had carried a snubnose 38 Special Smith & Wesson 442 as a backup and occasional primary for a decade. Recoil was difficult at best, and with age had become brutal. The shooter has already upgraded to a stainless-finish Smith & Wesson 638. With a duty load such as a Federal 129-grain

Hydra Shock, this revolver had become inviable for this shooter. He simply could no longer handle the recoil, despite his best efforts. An overlooked difficulty we will all face as we gain our majority is thinning skin. The rater's joints were taking a beating. To help, we added a set of Pachmayr oversize wood grips to the 638 (\$35.40 from Opticsplanet.com). This made a great difference. The shooter felt his recoil tolerance had doubled, although 20 rounds of +P 38 Specials was still a limit for meaningful practice. We also recommended a standard-pressure loading in 110 grains to reduce recoil, such as the Hornady 110-grain FTX (\$21/20 rounds from AmmunitionDepot.com). The two changes, larger grips to spread out recoil and a lighter carry load, made the snubnose 38 viable for this user for many more years. While wound ballistics may suffer, shot placement might make up for the deficit.

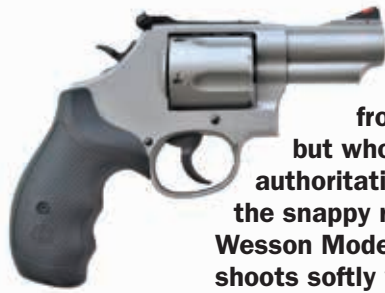
We went a bit further in exploring the 38 Special snubnose. As one rater noted, senior shooters are not slaves to fashion. They may wear baggy and loose-fitting attire. For many who prefer the snubnose 38 Special, there are larger six-shot revolvers that perform well. We provided a Colt Cobra stainless-steel 2-inch-barrel revolver to the senior and let him fire this revolver extensively. Firing first with Black Hills Ammunition 38 Special 148-grain wadcutters (\$33.32/50 from TargetsportsUSA.com), the shooter found the piece much easier to control than the smaller J-frame. Then he fired Winchester 125-grain Silvertip +Ps (\$35/50 from SGAmmo.com) and found the Colt Cobra was much easier to use well than the J-frame. He said the Cobra was as easy to use as a 4-inch-barrel revolver on most points.

Our Team Said: Senior shooters should avoid J-frame 38-Special-size revolvers if they are able to conceal larger handguns. Clearly, for home defense, the difference in size isn't important. The D-frame Colt wheelguns are a much better choice. Even if stoked with lighter loads, the slightly larger size offers excellent protection.



Snubnose revolvers chambered in 38 Special are among the most difficult handguns to manage for hand-strength restricted shooters, our raters said.

THE GUN LIFESTYLE



For the older shooter who wants to step down from a 357 Magnum, but who still wants an authoritative load without the snappy recoil, the Smith & Wesson Model 69 in 44 Magnum shoots softly with 44 Specials.

The 44 Special: A Far Out Replacement That Works

A lot of older shooters know and love the Smith & Wesson Model 13, a medium-frame revolver chambered for the 357 Magnum cartridge. But as time wore on, the original grips on one owner's gun were eating his hands up, along with the 125-grain JHP Magnum ammo — a very effective load but among the most difficult to control. This shooter did not believe in small groups on the target, but instead wanted a solid hit in the right place. Another point on seniors — their minds are often made up on some things, and while we may disagree, they aren't often wrong.

To ameliorate the owner's troubles with his M13, we added a set of Ahrends grips (\$80 from AhrendsGripsUSA.com). This helped a great deal in comparison to the original Magna-type grips. However, the greatest advantage was in switching to 38 Special ammunition. Truth be told, the majority of Magnums issued to peace officers a generation or more ago were loaded with 38 +P ammunition rather than full-strength 357s. We used the Hornady FTX. With these loads, the user was happy with firing the revolver.

There were other problems, however. The user felt that he could no longer conceal the 4-inch K-frame due to back problems. And he was not really pleased with 38 Special's wound potential. Another rater came up with a solution that was lighter, more compact, and satisfied the user's feelings about wound potential.

Some modern revolvers have a heavy trigger action. No getting around that. The Smith & Wesson L-frame often has a smooth trigger, and a 2.75-inch-barrel Model 69 in 44 Magnum we had on hand was at least as smooth as the old-timer's Model 13. When we measured the trigger action on the Lyman electronic trigger-pull gauge, the L-frame was actually lighter on the trigger than the well-used Model 13.

The Hogue factory grip was quite comfortable on the L-frame Model 69, which is lighter than the Model 13 by a tad, and the M69 revolver is controllable. Also, the price isn't bad (\$714 new from TombstoneTactical.com), and the short barrel and round butt make it easier to conceal.

But wait, you say — a senior needs less, not more, recoil and the Model 69 is a 44 Magnum. The solution is to load it with 44 Special ammunition, which gives this five shooter a potent and powerful load. The Hornady

180-grain XTP (\$19.50/20 from SportsmansGuide.com) breaks 980 fps from the Model 69. The power factor used to calculate recoil comes out to 172. The 125-grain 357 Magnum 125-grain JHP at 1400 fps gets a power-factor rating of 175. (Actual velocity of 125-grain Magnum loads in a 4-inch barrel may run 1370 fps to 1480 fps.) While the difference in recoil is slight by calculation, in actual firing, the 44 Special is much more pleasant to fire due to diminished muzzle blast. Also, there are considerably lighter loads in 44 Special, as light as 780 fps, that use the 0.429-inch-wide bullet. The Magnum may use 14 grains of slow-burning powder, while the 44 Special uses 5 to 8 grains of relatively fast-burning powder. Recoil seems more modest, and muzzle blast certainly is. The sights are the greatest single improvement. Aging eyes and a small groove in the top strap are not a good match. The Model 69's high-visibility sights are an excellent choice.

Our Team Said: When choosing a suitable firearm for an elder, finding the right mix of gun size and power can be intricate. Bigger and slower might mean more controllable than smaller and snappier, in terms of recoil.

Three Specific Recommendations

Up to this point, we had worked with shooters who had adopted handguns that were giving them difficulty as the shooters encountered problems that came with age. Less recoil tolerance and less muscle mass to carry heavy handguns were among the issues. Next we began to explore the best handguns for seniors without prior experience, and also those who may have diminished visual acuity. The goal was to find a handgun that was easy to rack and make ready and easy to use well. Here are a few specific choices.

Bond Arms Bullpup 9mm Luger, \$842

In a previous test, the Bond Arms Bullpup received high marks based on several factors. The rotating-barrel design helps mitigate 9mm recoil. The smooth double-action trigger isn't difficult to manage. The pistol is easily concealed. The Alien Gear holster selected kept the pistol at the proper angle for an easy draw without difficulty. But one of the greatest advantages of the pistol is its easy racking. This is quite simply the easiest full-power handgun to rack we have tested. This is due to the roller-bearing smooth

rotating barrel. There is no recoil spring, only a small slide return spring. The pistol is reliable.

Our Team Said: This is an excellent choice if hand-strength issues hold you back. Some of the drawbacks related to standard design handguns are not as important when a senior's comfort is considered.



CZ P10 S Optics Ready 95170 9mm Luger, \$577

We next considered what may be the best compact striker-fired polymer-frame handgun. Many are available, affordable, and reliable. We did not compare the CZ P10 S Optics Ready to other handguns in the usual GUN TESTS manner yet, but we looked at it in a one-off test for seniors. It did very well.

The CZ P10 S comes with several drilled and tapped plates for popular optics. The pistol was tested first with iron sights. The P10 S subcompact is slightly larger than the Glock 26. Most raters felt this makes for an easier handgun to use well. The magazines hold 12 cartridges. Firing Winchester USA 115-grain FMJs, our older shooters and our volunteer with



tiny hands found the pistol very well suited to all-round shooting chores. The forward cocking serrations give the user plenty of leverage in racking the slide. The trigger is pleasant enough to use well. The handgun doesn't stress the shooter. We mounted a Leupold Pro Point (\$400 from OpticsPlanet.com) on the CZ P10 S. The result was a fast-handling pistol that even those with limited vision find

useful. The CZ P10 S also features a rail for a combat light. We added the TruGlo combat light, \$76, which also provides a laser. The light and laser may be used in tandem or independently.

Our Team Said: With the dot sight, laser, and light, the modest recoil and weight of the 9mm CZ P10 S is a great choice for seniors. We will wait to give it a letter grade when we're able to shoot it head to head with other similar handguns, but we're confident recommending it if you or someone you know needs a handgun immediately.

SIG P229 RX 9mm Luger, \$1250

A number of older shooters prefer a double-action-first-shot handgun. They are leery of the new striker-fired guns and do not like cocked-and-locked carry. This is understandable, especially for home defense. The double-action-first-shot handgun may not perform as well on a combat course, but the overall handling and balance are attractive to many. Unlike the CZ P10 S, the P229 does not have grip inserts to morph the



handgun to the shooters hand and the P229 also has a longer trigger span. Just the same, we find the P229RX to be an excellent senior's choice. The pistol is as smooth and useful as any, with a double-action trigger pull of 12 pounds. The 4.2-pound single-action trigger is especially crisp. The pistol is supplied from the factory with a Romeo 1 red dot. The sight activates when

the handgun is moved and cuts off on its own after a few minutes of non-movement.

The SIG P229 RX was fired with the Winchester FMJ loads on hand. The raters felt the ergonomics were excellent, and the piece fit most

— continued on page 32

GUN TESTS

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— continued from page 31

hands well. Those used to a double-action handgun thought it a very good choice. However, our shooter with small hands could not reach the trigger.

Our Team Said: A senior used to the P220 45 ACP, but who has trouble coping with recoil, would find the SIG P229 RX in 9mm to be a godsend.

Other Considerations

As we mentioned, the older shooter carrying a Commander 45 downsized to a pistol he may control more easily. But he also was having difficulty with the magazine carrier, which he carried on the left side. (He is right handed.) The shoulder was simply a bit stiffer with age. By moving the magazine carrier to the right side in the appendix position, the older gentleman is able to reach to the magazine pouch, draw and reload. He has re-trained to this and doesn't skip a beat. While not as fast as the straight-to-the-rear magazine draw in theory, in reality this draw is faster for this individual. Thinking outside the box is beneficial to older shooters, and perhaps younger shooters as well.

Written and photographed by GUN TESTS staff. GT

COMING UP IN GUN TESTS

● We recently took a look at three revolvers, all of which have centerfire counterparts. Our test wheelguns included an S&W Model 617-6 built on an L-Frame, a Ruger LCRx built on the compact LCR/LCRx frame, and a Taurus 992 Tracker, which is built on the Taurus medium-size frame. Who would come out on top?

● Single-Action Rimfire Revolver Shoot-out: Inexpensive revolvers go head to head. Tested: Chiappa 1873, Heritage Rough Rider, Ruger Wrangler, and Traditions Rawhide Rancher.

● Recently, one of our readers contacted us and asked for a comparison on 308-caliber hunting rifles and specifically asked that we include the Tikka T3X Lite. We thought that sounded like a great idea. Our test rifles included the Tikka T3x Lite JRTXB316, the Remington Model 7 CDL 26423, the Winchester Model 70 Featherweight Stainless 535234220, and the Ruger Model 77 Hawkeye Compact 37139.

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