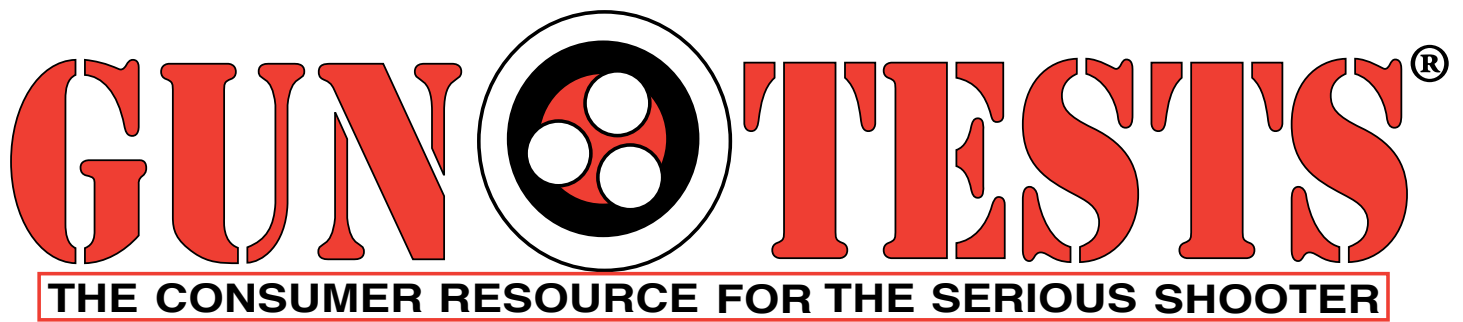




**Top guns selected by the writers and
editors of GUN TESTS® Magazine.**

HOMIE DEFENSE

BUYING GUIDE

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40 S&W Shoot Out: Beretta, CZ-USA, Ruger, and SIG Sauer

Looking for value, we tested two new forties against a used model we praised previously and a factory-refurbished handgun. We liked all four, but one was a standout at the range.

Pistols chambered for the 40 S&W round often are the odd man out as the first choice of a citizen contemplating arming himself or herself. Most of us choose the 45 ACP for its terminal performance and the 9mm Luger for capacity. Here, though, this report is in part a continuation of 40-caliber ammunition tests we conducted some years ago. One of our raters has much field experience and favored the 45 ACP and did not give the 40 S&W much attention. After empirical testing, he came to the conclusion that the 40 is more like the 45 than the 9mm in terminal ballistics, and that's a good place to be. This rater also tested compact and subcompact 40-caliber pistols and came away believing that forties lighter and smaller than the Glock 23 are too much for most shooters to handle well. So, it was logical that he gravitated toward service-size 40 S&W handguns as the right fit of cartridge and pistol.

Full-size handguns are among the most common 40 S&W handguns chosen for home and personal defense. They are relatively mild to fire and reliable.

With these facts in mind, we wanted to test four 40-caliber handguns of different configurations to see which one suited our testers the best. Also, we went looking for value, shooting two brand-new guns against veterans which, perhaps, still had some game left in them. The two new guns were a selective-double-action CZ 75B and the double-action-only Ruger SP40, which we found listing around \$580 and \$569, respectively. The other choices were the double-action first-shot SIG P226R and the double-action first-shot Beretta 96 Vertec Inox, the latter a used model and the former was a factory rebuild offered by SIG Sauer.

The Beretta Model 96 Vertec has received praise from us before, being named a Gun of the Year in 2005 after being evaluated in the April 2005 issue. We said then, "Alloy 40 S&W pistols have a well-earned reputation for packing plenty of power in their lightweight frames, but they are also well-known for being vicious kickers for the training shooter. However, the Model 96 Vertec was an exception." In particular, we liked the vertical grip design that, combined with the thinner grip panels and short-reach trigger, made the pistol much friendlier to shooters with smaller hands. We liked it because its flat-sided feel and more rectangular shape were easier to index, that is, get in proper alignment faster. This time we tested the stainless version.



From top: The double-action-first-shot SIG P226R, the double-action-first-shot Beretta 96 Vertec, the selective-double-action CZ 75B, and the double-action-only Ruger SP40. The Ruger and CZ were new, while the Beretta was found on the used market and the SIG was a factory rebuild. We liked all four, but the consensus was that the SIG P226R is a great gun at a fair price. The Beretta Model 96 Vertec in blued finish was named a Gun of the Year in 2005. We liked the vertical grip design that, combined with the thinner grip panels and short-reach trigger, made the pistol friendlier to small hands. The flat-sided feel and more rectangular shape were easier to get in proper alignment faster.

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Certified Pre-Owned SIG Sauer pistols like the P226R tested here are often traded in by law-enforcement agencies for new SIGs, and the company puts the pre-owned SIG pistols through a stringent Factory Certification process. Each pistol is stripped, refitted with original factory parts where needed, cleaned, lubricated, function tested and hand-inspected by a factory technician. Each Factory Certified pre-owned SIG comes with a one-year warranty and one standard-capacity magazine. The condition of these pistols will vary depending on the amount of wear, such as that caused by a holster and ring wear, and that condition will be reflected in the retail price. Dings and holster wear and ring scratches are not covered under the one-year factory warranty.

We have tested a similarly set up CZ 75B previously (May 2009), but chambered in 9mm. In that test we noted the accuracy of the CZ was about 2.5 inches for all shots fired at 15 yards. We also noted the heavy CZ dampened 9mm recoil, and there were no problems with the CZ whatsoever. It appeared to be very well made and built to last. We looked forward to testing the 40 S&W version.

Likewise, we have tested a Ruger SR40 previously, most recently in the October 2011 issue. In that review, we said, the SR40 was remarkably underrated, and it might be a plastic gun for people who don't like plastic guns. We said, "Its slender profile makes it more controllable than most high-capacity guns, and it's a good candidate for concealed carry, too. We liked having manual safeties even if they weren't perfect. Though not match grade, we thought the trigger was predictable with a reasonable sense of take-up and overtravel." That model was the BSR40, with an all-black color scheme and a 15+1 capacity, which is now listed by the company as Model 3471. This new SR40 is Model 3470, still with the same 15+1 capacity, but this time with a brushed-stainless-steel slide.

It is good to note up high that even

CZ-USA CZ 75B 01120 40 S&W, \$580
GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

The CZ 75 was accurate, reliable, and combat worthy. The shortcomings were due to lack of two practical features: No decocker and no accessory rail.

Action	Double Action Semi-Auto, Locked Breech	
Overall Length	8.1 in.	
Overall Height	5.4 in.	
Maximum Width	1.4 in.	
Weight Unloaded	35.2 oz.	
Weight Loaded	43.5 oz.	
Barrel Length	4.6 in.	
Barrel	Blued Steel	
Magazine	(1) 10-rd. Blued Steel	
Slide	Black Polycoated Steel	
Frame	Black Polycoated Steel	
Frame Front Strap Height	2.75 in.	
Frame Back Strap Height	3.75 in.	
Grip	Plastic	
Grip Thickness (max)	1.4 in.	
Grip Circumference (max)	5.4 in.	
Sights	Black Polycoated Steel	
Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	14.0 lbs.	
Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	4.5 lbs.	
Trigger Span Single Action	2.6 in.	
Safety	Manual Lever; Firing Pin Block	
Warranty	5-Yr. Limited	
Phone	(800) 955-4486	
Website	CZ-USA.com	

Here's the characteristic external extractor and ejection port of the CZ 75 B, a time-tested design.

The pistol may be placed on safe during tactical movement or for cocked-and-locked carry.

The CZ's green three-dot treatment had a degree of self luminosity.

The Lobo Gunleather IWB holster demanded a considerable break-in period, characteristic of custom-grade leather.

with the mix of operating systems and handling characteristics, we encountered no failures to feed,

chamber, fire, or eject with any loads in any of the handguns tested. Of course, there were things we didn't

like or liked more on one gun than another, and for those insights, continue reading below:

**CZ-USA CZ 75B 01120
40 S&W, \$580**

The 'B' designation indicates that the model is equipped with a firing-pin-block safety. The price is a recent cost at CheaperThanDirt.com. The manufacturer number of 01120 reflects a gun that ships with a 10-round magazine, but we tested with Mec-Gar 12-round magazines that are widely available, including at MidsouthShootersSupply.com for \$26.

The CZ-USA 75B looked at first glance to be a replica of the thousands of CZ 75 pistols sold worldwide. The CZ 75B was finished in a black coating that is evenly applied and attractive. The pistol's dust cover is thicker than on the 9mm, so some holsters, such as the tightly fitted Lobo Gunleather IWB used in the test, will require a significant break-in period before the handgun will properly fit a holster blocked for the 9mm CZ 75 B. The sights were an improvement over the original CZ design, combat sights that offered rapid acquisition and a clear sight picture. They were enameled with a green three-dot treatment. The paint was self luminous and glowed green for some time after being exposed to light.

The cocking serrations were adequate; however, some effort was required to cock the slide. That's because the slide rides lower in the receiver than on the other handguns. The CZ uses a system in which the slide rails are inside the frame, the opposite of most handguns. The result is a good slide-to-frame interface and also a lower bore axis than most other double-action handguns.

The double-action trigger was long, but smooth, at 14 pounds. The single-action trigger press was clean at 4.5 pounds with the slight backlash characteristic of the type. The grip was comfortable, with a modest S curve that made for a good fit and feel.

The pistol was a double-action first-shot handgun. The manual safety was well placed for ergonomic

**BERETTA MODEL 96 VERTEC INOX 40 S&W,
~\$600 USED**

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Accuracy was good, if not outstanding. The pistol was reliable and we liked the safety features. The Beretta offers the lowest magazine capacity of the pistols tested. Beretta fans will likely prefer the Inox over the others, but we preferred the SIG P226.

Action	Double-Action Semi-Auto, Locked Breech
Overall Length	8.5 in.
Overall Height	5.4 in.
Maximum Width	1.5 in.
Weight Unloaded	32.0 oz.
Weight Loaded 11 rounds	39.7 oz.
Barrel Length	4.9 in.
Barrel	Stainless Steel
Magazine	Steel, 11 Rds.
Slide	Stainless Steel; Open Design
Frame	Aluminum; 1-Slot Accessory Rail
Frame Front Strap Height	2.4 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.5 in.
Grips	Plastic
Grip Thickness (max)	1.3 in.



Grip Circumference (max)	5.5 in.
Sights	Steel
Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	15 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	4.0 lbs.
Trigger Span Single Action	2.4 in.
Safety	Manual Safety/Decocker
Warranty	NA



The Vertec grip fit most hands well, our shooters said.



The Vertec front sight, left, is a big improvement over the standard Beretta 92, right.



The Beretta's straight-line feed is an advantage in feed reliability. Note the open design of the slide.

Many feel the Beretta safety/decocker is an advantage in safe handling. All depends on your training, of course.

SIG SAUER P226R FACTORY-CERTIFIED PRE-OWNED 40 S&W, \$725 GUN TESTS GRADE: A+

The pre-owned SIG P226R turned in as-new performance. Reliable and fast handling, the SIG got high marks during the firing tests. The pistol was ergonomic and fit most hands well. The double-action trigger was very smooth. The pistol's advantage over the other handguns was its accuracy.

Action	Double Action Semi-Auto, Locked Breech		
Overall Length	7.7 in.		
Overall Height	5.5 in.		
Maximum Width	1.5 in.		
Weight Unloaded	34.0 oz.		
Weight Loaded 12 rounds	42.4 oz.		
Barrel Length	4.4 in.		
Barrel	Blued Steel		
Magazine	12 Rds., Blued Steel	Sights	Steel
Slide	Steel	Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	12.0 lbs.
Frame	Aluminum	Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	4.25 lbs.
Frame Front Strap Height	2.5 in.	Trigger Span Single Action	2.4 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.4 in.	Safety	No Manual Safety
Grips	Plastic	Warranty	1 Year
Grip Thickness (max)	1.4 in.	Telephone	(603) 610-3000
Grip Circumference (max)	5.6 in.	Website	SIGSauer.com



Accuracy with all pistols was combat acceptable, but SIG's P226R was stellar. It is rated highly enough for hostage-rescue use where accuracy is at a premium. We thought this handgun was a great value.



The SIG decocker and slide lock are close to the hand and easily manipulated.



The SIG P226R was fired in the same range drills with the same ammunition as the other pistols and was drawn from a Nelson holster, shown, one of the best-designed and executed IWB types we have used in some time. The Neoprene backing on a leather holster may be an original step.

manipulation. The safety cannot be placed in the Fire position with the hammer down. (Clones may differ.) The CZ 75B is often termed a selective-double-action pistol. This is because the hammer may be cocked and the safety applied, allowing cocked-and-locked carry. While some find this carry well suited to their personal scenarios, the raters believed this was not the original intent. We believe that the pistol was designed to be carried hammer down. Then, after the first shot, you are better prepared to be in a gunfight. The conventional double-action first-shot pistol would have to be decocked for safe movement during tactical maneuvers. The CZ may be quickly placed on Safe after the first shot is fired, then the shooter can simply thumb the safety off and resume firing. This is a tactical advantage.

The practical advantage of the SIG and Beretta double-action pistols is that the hammer may be decocked without ever touching the trigger. To make the CZ ready, the slide is lowered on a loaded magazine and the thumb controls the hammer as the trigger is pressed to lower the hammer. A shooter adopting the CZ 75 must be aware of this system at all times.

The pistols were fired with SIG Sauer 180-grain FMJ loads (\$20/50 @ Brownells.com) during the combat firing stage. Drawing from concealment and firing at man-sized targets at 7 yards, we expended two magazines and then moved to firing groups as rapidly as possible at 10 yards. We loaded magazines with 10 rounds for these drills, with the last drill firing 10 shots offhand at 15 yards. The CZ 75 was fired in the double-action first-shot mode. The pistol gave a good accounting of itself, with good control and combat accuracy. The raters felt that this pistol showed the best combat type shooting results.

Next, the pistol was fired for accuracy from a solid benchrest firing position at 25 yards. Ammunition included the Black Hills Ammunition 180-grain JHP, the Hornady 155-grain XTP, and the Winchester Win3Gun 180-grain FMJ loading. Accuracy

RUGER SR40 3470 40 S&W, \$569

GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

The pistol exhibited more felt recoil than the others; however, it was also lighter than the other handguns, so this wasn't unexpected. The grip fit most hands well. The big advantage of the Ruger is magazine capacity. The pistol holds 15 rounds of hard-hitting 40 S&W ammunition. The pistol's combat accuracy was acceptable, but in this test, it was the least accurate handgun. We're not fans of the takedown process.

Action	DAO Semi-Auto; Locked Breech		
Overall Length	7.5 in.		
Overall Height	5.5 in.		
Maximum Width	1.3 in.		
Weight Unloaded	26 oz.		
Weight Loaded	36.5 oz.		
Barrel Length	4.1 in.		
Barrel	Steel		
Magazine	15 Rds, Steel		
Slide	Stainless Steel	Sights	Steel
Frame	Reinforced Nylon	Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	6.5 lbs.
Frame Front Strap Height	2.7 in.	Trigger Span Double Action	2.5 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.75 in.	Safety	Lever
Grips	NA	Warranty	None Written
Grip Thickness (max)	1.25 in.	Telephone	(336) 949-5200
Grip Circumference (max)	5.5 in.	Website	Ruger.com



Although the Ruger SR40 kicked the most of the pistols tested, it was controllable.



The Ruger's takedown, using a lever in the frame, wasn't the most popular with the raters.



An advantage of the Ruger SR40 is its light weight. That creates more noticeable recoil, of course, but physics will be physics. Balance was still centered in the hand.

was consistent, with most groups averaging less than 2.5 inches, a good showing. The best average came with the Hornady 155-grain XTP at 1.9 inches. The CZ was more accurate than the Ruger and edged the Beretta out by a small margin. The SIG was more accurate with every load, but only by a small margin.

Our Team Said: Raters were split on the CZ 75 B. All gave the pistol high marks for reliability. Accuracy was excellent. The pistol is comfortable to fire. The lack of a decocking lever was a serious drawback to some. This was the personal pistol of our most experienced rater, and he feels that the CZ 75B isn't the pistol for the casually interested shooter. We feel that for most users, the SIG system is superior. Another demerit came for the lack of a light rail.

Beretta 96 Vertec Inox 40 S&W, ~\$600 (Used)

Introduced in 1990, the Beretta 96 is a 40 S&W chambering of the Beretta 92 9mm pistol. It was discontinued in 2007. The Vertec variation is similar to the new Beretta 96A1. The Vertec has several parts made of stainless steel, also known as inox steel, or inox, from the French "inoxydable": the slide (extractor, safety, and manual safety lever), the barrel, the trigger and trigger pin, the slide-stop lever, and the grip screws.

The anodized aluminum grip frame is intended to fit most hands well and alleviate concerns over the large grip of the high-capacity Beretta handgun. While more comfortable than the original Beretta grip, the Vertec treatment doesn't seem to lower the pistol's bore axis in the hand, we found. The stainless slide offers nice polish; even though this was a used gun (perhaps a police trade-in), our shooters thought it was more attractive than the new Ruger. There was no eccentric wear noted on the locking wedge, which appeared original, but there were signs the pistol had seen use. The decocker and magazine release were well worn.

The sights are good examples of combat sights. The front sight was

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dovetailed in place, an advantage over the Beretta 92. The pistol featured night sights, and they still had some self-luminous glow — we'd guess about 60 percent of full, new tritium brightness.

The pistol is a double-action first-shot pistol. In common with the CZ and SIG tested, the first shot cocks and drops the hammer. After the first shot, the slide cocks the hammer for subsequent shots. The trigger action was smooth, if long, at about 15 pounds. The single-action trigger mechanism broke at 4 pounds — the lightest single-action trigger tested.

The decocker was slide mounted and also acts as a manual safety. If carried on Safe, the action to take the safety off isn't nearly as ergonomic as a frame-mounted safety. However, with a rapid straight-thumb motion, it may be operated with a degree of rapidity. We like the SIG's frame-mounted decocker better, but then there isn't a need for a speed decock. If you prefer your double-action pistol to have a safety, then the Beretta should be your choice. The Beretta magazine holds 11 rounds, one fewer than the other double-action pistols and four fewer than the Ruger.

Our Team Said: All in all, we thought this used gun was well worth the money. The pistol was reliable and performed well during the firing tests. The Vertec grip gave a good fit and allowed real speed on the draw. The pistol wasn't as ergonomic as the CZ; however, despite a higher bore axis in the hand, the Beretta was comfortable to fire and use. Accuracy on the combat course was rated below the CZ and the SIG. In benchrest accuracy, the single most accurate loading was the Black Hills 180-grain jacketed hollowpoints, with an average of 2.3 inches.

Factory Certified Pre-Owned SIG P226R 40 S&W, \$725

This was our price from South Carolina Gun Company (SCgun.com). This was a police service pistol that has been refurbished. The pistol was delivered in a red cardboard box to distinguish it as a factory refurbished item. Still, the pistol appeared as new. The fit, finish, and quality control on the SIG left little more to be desired. Savings were \$225 compared to the common \$950 counter price of a new P226 with a rail and regular sights. Like two other test pistols, this one featured a rail, thus the "R" designation in the model number (which has been dropped from currently manufactured guns, most of which include a rail).

The SIG is a double-action first-shot pistol like the Beretta, but it featured no manual safety. The decocker was very ergonomic, located between the trigger guard and the grip frame. The trigger action was the smoothest double-action first-shot pistol tested, with a break at about 12 pounds. The single-action trigger broke at 4.25 pounds. Reset was much faster than other SIGS we have tested.

The sights were good examples of combat sights, with the typical SIG white outline treatment. The grip frame fit most hands well. The bore axis sat higher in

This is representative of what we got during rapid-fire drills with the SR40. Not bad, but we thought the others were better.



the hand than the CZ or Ruger, and similar to the Beretta 96, and recoil moved straight back down the shooter's arm. Handfit was comparable to the Beretta, but not quite on the par with the CZ for most shooters.

The pistol was fast on target, and the smooth trigger action aided in landing a fast and accurate first shot. Control in rapid fire was comparable to the Beretta and better than the Ruger overall, but the heavier CZ was more controllable and did a better job in rapid fire. Still, in firing double taps and in rapidly engaging targets, the SIG did well. The vote was close.

In the benchrest firing session, it had a clear-cut edge over the other handguns. The refurbished SIG was most accurate with the three loads tested, averaging less than 2 inches for five shots in most of the testing. The Black Hills Ammunition 180-grain JHP exhibited a brilliant 1.4-inch group on one occasion, while the average was 1.9 inches.

Our Team Said: Based on accuracy, reliability, relatively light weight, firing comfort, and a fair price, the Factory Certified Pre-Owned SIG P226R earned an A+ rating.

Ruger SR40 Model 3470 40 S&W, \$569

The Ruger featured a polymer frame and stainless-steel slide. This is the lightest pistol tested. Magazine capacity was the highest at 15 cartridges. It was a little stiff loading the last cartridge, but if you choose to load only 14, you still have more cartridges than in the other handguns. The fit and finish were good, and the fit to the frame was acceptable, but there was considerable lateral motion when the slide was grasped and rocked from side to side. The pistol incorporated a light rail, a feature in common with the SIG and the Beretta.

The sights presented a three-dot outline and were acceptable; the notch in the rear sight was smaller than the other pistols, but still usable. The rear sight is actually an insert in a larger sight body and offers good adjustment. We liked the sights of the CZ much better, and the SIG and Beretta sights a little better, than the Ruger.

The Ruger is a much fresher, newer design than the 1970's 9mm designs that have been converted to 40 S&W. The combination of checkering on the side panels and front strap and back strap provided good grip surfaces when firing.

RANGE DATA

Black Hills 40 S&W 180-grain JHP

Average Velocity
Muzzle Energy
Smallest Group
Largest Group
Average Group Size

Beretta 96 Inox (Used)

984 fps
386 ft.-lbs.
2.0 in.
2.5 in.
2.3 in

CZ-USA 75B

998 fps
398 ft.-lbs.
1.8 in.
2.4 in.
2.1 in.

Ruger SR40

975 fps
379 ft.-lbs.
2.1 in.
2.6 in.
2.4 in.

SIG Sauer P226R (FCPO*)

966 fps
372 ft.-lbs.
1.4 in.
2.4 in.
1.9 in.

Hornady Custom 40 S&W 155-gr. XTP JHP #9132

Average Velocity
Muzzle Energy
Smallest Group
Largest Group
Average Group Size

Beretta 96 Inox (Used)

1090 fps
408 ft.-lbs.
2.4 in.
2.8 in.
2.6 in.

CZ-USA 75B

1124 fps
434 ft.-lbs.
1.5 in.
2.3 in.
2.0 in

Ruger SR40

1060 fps
386 ft.-lbs.
2.2 in.
3.0 in.
2.6 in.

SIG Sauer P226R (FCPO*)

1082 fps
402 ft.-lbs.
1.6 in.
2.1 in.
1.9 in.

Winchester Win3Gun 40 S&W 180-gr. FMJ

Average Velocity
Muzzle Energy
Smallest Group
Largest Group
Average Group Size

Beretta 96 Inox (Used)

990 fps
391 ft.-lbs.
2.2 in.
2.8 in.
2.4 in.

CZ-USA 75B

970 fps
375 ft.-lbs.
2.0 in.
2.5 in.
2.2 in.

Ruger SR40

944 fps
356 ft.-lbs.
2.5 in.
3.2 in.
2.8 in.

SIG Sauer P226R (FCPO*)

969 fps
375 ft.-lbs.
1.8 in.
2.3 in.
2.1 in.



*Factory Certified Pre-Owned. Notes: Average velocity readings were recorded by firing five-shot strings over a Competition Electronics Pro Chrono. The muzzle was 10 feet from the first skyscreen. Ambient temperature: 45 degrees. Elevation: 815 feet above sea level. The accuracy figures are the average of three five-shot groups. For accuracy, we fired the test gun from a benchrest at a 25-yard target. Ammunition sources: Black Hills 180-grain Jacketed Hollow Points 40 S&W, \$15/20 @ VenturaMunitions.com. Hornady Custom 155-gr. XTP Jacketed Hollow Points #9132 40 S&W, \$17/20 @ LuckyGunner.com. Winchester Win3Gun 180-grain Full Metal Jacket #X40TG 40 S&W, \$19.70/50 @ CheaperThanDirt.com.

The 40 S&W ammunition used during the test gave good accuracy and never failed to fire. From top are the Hornady Custom 155-gr. XTP Jacketed Hollow Points #9132, the Black Hills 180-grain Jacketed Hollow Points, Winchester's Win3Gun 180-grain Full Metal Jackets, and SIG Sauer's Elite Performance 180-grain FMJ loads used during the combat firing stage.

The pistol features a manual safety that may be used or ignored. The Ruger handled well. Felt recoil was the greatest of the handguns tested, a result of light weight and a thin grip cross-section. On the other hand, the grip fit most hands well.

The trigger action was similar to a Glock, with the striker prepped as the slide recoiled. The trigger featured a safety lever set into the trigger face. The trigger broke at 6.5 pounds, the same for every shot, an advantage, some feel, in personal defense. The trigger was good for making first-shot hits. However, the trigger was heavier than the single-action trigger press of any of the other pistols.

Takedown was too complicated, in our view. The slide was locked to the rear, the ejector pressed down, and then the takedown lever pressed out. A tool was needed

to press the takedown lever out. As far as takedown, we liked the SIG and Beretta equally, the CZ next, and finally the Ruger.

Our Team Said: The pistol was useful for personal defense and the groups were not bad. However, the SR40 held no advantage over other pistols. Most of the raters felt the other handguns performed better in fast-shooting drills. In benchrest accuracy, the pistol gave credible results, but not up to the standard of the other handguns. The worst groups were almost 3 inches, while the best group, with the Hornady 155-grain XTPs, was just over 2 inches.

The raters did not find a bad gun among the four, and we would buy any of them under the right circumstances. However, we preferred the others over the Ruger SR40.

Written and photographed by R.K. Campbell, using evaluations from GUN TESTS team testers. GT

Home-Defense Shotguns: We Compare Three Pump Actions

All based on the proven Remington 870 pattern, we tested an Advantage Tactical upgrade, an Express Tactical unit, and an IAC Hawk 982. All will do the job, but the Hawk is a Best Buy.

The shotgun is seen by many as the best choice for personal defense and especially home defense. The most powerful portable shoulder-fired weapon used for self preservation, the 12-gauge shotgun offers a multiple-projectile load that has been proven effective in close-quarters defense. With slug loads, it is even suitable for defense against large, dangerous animals. In rural defense, there are plenty of deadly predators in the country, feral dogs, mountain lions, and other dangerous animals that only an aggressive counterattack will stop. But without proper firearm and load selection, as well as training, the shotgun will be underutilized. More than one citizen has defended himself with the shotgun, and common sense tells us that we should have one in the home.

In this test, the shotguns we chose are among the best in their price range. The choices range from a pedestrian bead-sighted model to a tactical model with an AR-15 type stock. While self-loaders rule the day at 3 Gun competitions and are very reliable, a dirty pump

Fun isn't the word for firing strings of full-power buckshot.



Our test set of defensive shotguns included, from top, the Remington Express Tactical 12-Gauge Pump Action, \$346; the Chinese-made IAC Hawk 982 12-Gauge Pump Action, \$233; and the Remington 870 Police Shotgun Modified with Adaptive Tactical Forend and M4 Type Stock, \$420. The basic designs were all 870-based, so many of the handling and controls cues were the same.

will work when a dirty automatic will not. We have seen self-loaders malfunction during our test programs, and we know the pump-action shotgun is relatively easy to master, as long as you get quality training so you're confident in your skills and sure in your manipulation.

With this in mind, we chose three likely shotguns for home defense. The top end of the budget was \$450, but we would prefer to spend less to get a good pump-action gun, if we could. We fired them with practice loads, home defense loads, good loads suitable for pest and predators, and slugs suitable for defense against large animals. We used five different loads for testing these shotguns. We tried to find the most economical offerings in bulk. This included the Fiocchi 12HV75 birdshot (\$97 for 250 shotshells from CheaperThanDirt.com) Fiocchi 1-ounce Aero slugs (\$8.10/10 from VenturaMunitions.com), Hornady 86240 Critical Defense 00 buckshot loads

Left: The IAC Hawk 982 is the Best Buy of this shoot-out, according to our testers. The Ghost Ring rear sight gives a trained shooter the ability to deliver fast hits and is well protected by metal wings. The front sight is well suited to precision shooting with slugs.

(\$11.08/10 from CheaperThanDirt.com), Hornady's Varmint Express, a load using 24 pellets at 1350 fps (\$16/10 from Gandermountain.com), and Winchester 3-inch 12-gauge 00 buckshot loads (No. XB12300VB, \$17/15 from CheaperThanDirt.com) This selection covered the likely uses for personal defense, predators, and even large animals. Each shotgun was fired with 50 birdshot shells, 10 of each of the buckshot loads, and 10 Fiocchi slugs, for a total of at least 90 shells per gun. This is punishing work and was not accomplished in a single range session. We fired mainly the light-kicking birdshot to learn how to function the guns quickly and determine their smoothness and ergonomics.

Here are the results.

Remington 870 Police Shotgun Modified with Adaptive Tactical Forend and M4-Type Stock, \$420

We arrived at the package price for this gun by taking a reasonable acquisition cost for an average used 870 Police model shotgun (\$300) and adding to it the cost of the Adaptive Tactical Forend and M4-type stock, \$120. One of our testers upgraded the Riot gun with the Adaptive Tactical (AdaptiveTactical.com) stock and forend set. The EX Performance Adjustable Stock with pistol grip features an easy-to-reach rapid-adjust lever for custom length of pull, and includes an integrated QD swivel attachment and molded in non-rust standard sling swivel attachment. A non-slip vented rubber recoil pad, oversized extra strength adjustment pin, and sleek industrial design complete the buttstock's specifications.

The EX Performance Forend features a 2-inch Picatinny rail concealed under the nose cap. Uncovered, it's ideal for attaching tactical accessories like lasers or lights. The EX Performance stock set is also available for the Mossberg 500 & 88, 590 series shotguns. A drop-in replacement AR Rear Stock (RAS) is also available for AR-15/M4 carbines or other shotguns/rifles utilizing Mil-

REMINGTON 870 MODIFIED POLICE MODEL, ADAPTIVE TACTICAL FOREND AND M4 STOCK, \$420 GUN TESTS GRADE: B

This is one man's idea of an all-round shotgun. Years of familiarity and trust are built into the package. With the Adaptive Tactical M4 stock, he now has a shotgun that handles in a similar fashion to his Colt M4 rifle. We liked the package overall. This is the kind of lightly modified shotgun in use in the thousands across the country. The shotgun was rated down, however, in comparison to the magazine capacity and sighting equipment of the other shotguns. This is a good shotgun but it simply isn't all it could be.



Action type	Pump; 3 in. Chamber	Forearm	Adaptive Tactical w/Light Rail
Overall Length	35.8 to 39 in.	Forearm Length	9.4 in.
Capacity	4	Front Sight	Post
Weight Unloaded	8.0 lbs.	Rear Sight	Rifle Type
Barrel	18.0 in. Long; Steel	Trigger Pull Weight	7.5 lbs.
Receiver	Steel	Warranty	None, Used
Choke	Cylinder	Telephone	(800) 243-9700
Buttstock	Adaptive Tactical M4 Type	Website	AdaptiveTactical.com
Buttstock Length of Pull	11.25 to 14.5 in.	Made In	U.S.A.



The ability to mount a combat light is an important upgrade.



The Adaptive Tactical pistol grip offers excellent adhesion when firing, a real plus with big loads.



The Adaptive Tactical stock features an effective butt pad that we really like.



The Remington's sights are an improvement over the bead front sight, but we like the Ghost Ring on the Hawk better.

REMINGTON MODEL 870 EXPRESS SYNTHETIC TACTICAL 12 GAUGE, \$346 GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The Remington 870 Express Tactical is an affordable shotgun with the advantages of Remington's limited lifetime warranty and proven quality. We liked the magazine capacity, and we will take the muzzle brake, even if we could not discern its effectiveness. The shortcoming is the simple bead front sight, which limits slug accuracy past 10 yards. Conversely, as a shotgun to be used only with buckshot and only in the home, the bead front sight is a good choice.



Action	Pump, 3 in. Chamber	Forearm	Polymer
Overall Length	40 in., 38 in. w/o Screw In Tactical Brake	Forearm Length	6.75 in.
Capacity	6	Front Sight	Bead
Weight Unloaded	7.5 lbs.	Rear Sight	None
Barrel	18 in., Steel	Trigger Pull Weight	4.5 lbs.
Receiver	Steel	Warranty	Limited Lifetime
Choke	Cylinder	Telephone	(800) 243-9700
Buttstock	Polymer	Website	Remington.com
Buttstock Length of Pull	13.8 in.	Made In	U.S.A.



We found the muzzle brake of the 870 Express Tactical may have softened recoil to an extent with the heaviest loads.



The solid recoil pad was okay, but we preferred the vented pads of the other shotguns.



The Tactical is an able housegun.



The simple bead front sight was fast at short range, but it was less precise at longer range.

Spec sized extension tubes.

After many years of teaching the shotgun and carbine, our rater elected to add this AR stock to his personal long-serving 870 to provide a common feel between rifle and shotgun and also for ease of carry in the truck. So, we are rating both the shotgun's application and the parts. The parts are not plastic, but instead are made of high-impact polymer and have a solid feel. We fitted an inexpensive NC3 light for evaluation.

The stock is solid, and without rattles, and is easily adjusted. Being able to shorten it does help when storing the Remington in the home or when using it as a truck gun. We really like the vented recoil pad, something you do not need with the M4 rifle, but which you do need with the hard-kicking 12 gauge. We liked the parts, and if we were rating the shotgun parts alone, they would get an A. These parts added a half pound to the base Remington 870 Riot gun, making it the heaviest in the test. As might be expected, it also kicked the least, and felt recoil was mitigated by the vented recoil pad.

The Remington with Adaptive Tactical hardware fared well, but individual perception can change the assessment, so let us tell you where we started.

As an example, shooters mostly using the AR-15 liked the set up better than those using traditional shotguns for bird hunting. To each chore the proper tool. We liked the stock very much, and the forend with its mounted combat light makes a lot of sense. With a Blackhawk sling added, this is a neat tactical set up.

The primary differences among the shotguns were the sights. The slide action, trigger action, push-button safety, sliding bolt lock, and loading sequence are all the same in the three shotguns. But the shotguns featured fixed rifle-type sights, a simple bead, and Ghost Ring sights. This shotgun was the first tested, and it featured rifle sights common to riot guns. These sights are not as fast as the bead or Ghost Ring sights for rapid combat work. We fired the buckshot

at individual targets at 7, 10, and 16 yards. The densest pattern was with Hornady #4 buckshot, producing a 7x9-inch group at 16 yards. The others gave a 9x12 to 9x15-inch pattern. The hardest-kicking load was the Winchester 3-inch 00 buckshot load. The Winchester gave a large pattern, but there are 15 balls. Felt recoil was the least of the shotguns tested, although by a small margin; the shotgun was also heavier with the Adaptive Tactical stock. Before firing the shotgun for accuracy with slugs, we noted that the trigger was heavy at 7.5 pounds, common for older riot guns.

Firing the Fiocchi slugs at 15 yards, two were in a single ragged hole, touching, which we repeated with the Hawk 982. The slugs were on the point of aim because the owner had previously sighted the shotgun in. The third shell in the three-round group was less than an inch away. The owner reports 4-inch 50-yard groups.

Our Team Said: This set-up is a good one, and we feel that the Adaptive Tactical stock and forend are good features. But note it is for the shooter who wants to aim every shot rather than point the shotgun. We rated the package down a full grade based on the sights, which weren't as good as the Ghost Ring set on another shotgun. Also, this unit only has a four-round magazine capacity, and it sports a heavy trigger. It will certainly do the job, but we think another selections offers more value for the money.

Remington Express Tactical 12-Gauge Pump Action, \$346

This shotgun, purchased at retail from Impactguns.com, is something of a hybrid with the standard Express Tactical (No. 25077) economy-line synthetic stock, but a tactical muzzle brake. A set of Ghost Ring sights and the muzzle brake add more than \$150 retail to the Remington, per our research. In keeping with the budget theme, we selected a proven action at a fair price. This Remington features a bead front sight. Controls and action are the same as the other shotguns. The matte finish is evenly applied. The forend is the skinniest

IAC IMPORTS HAWK MODEL 982 DEFENSE 12 GAUGE, \$233

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

The Hawk 982 is the least-expensive shotgun tested and among the least-expensive 12-gauge pumps we have tested. The Hawk never malfunctioned, never short cycled, and gave good results.

The pattern with buckshot was slightly tighter than the other shotguns. The primary advantage discovered in firing was the excellent aperture sights. The Hawk is a Best Buy.



Action	Pump; 3 in. Chamber	Buttstock Length of Pull	13.8 in.
Overall Length	38.5 in.	Forearm	Black Polymer; 9 in. Long
Capacity	5	Front Sight	Post
Weight Unloaded	7.5 lbs.	Rear Sight	Ghost Ring Aperture
Barrel Length	18.5 in.	Trigger Pull Weight	6.0 in.
Barrel	Steel; Matte Black Finish	Warranty	1 Year
Receiver	Steel; Matte Black Finish	Telephone	(800) 243-3006
Choke	Fixed Cylinder	Website	IACShotguns.com
Buttstock	Black Polymer w/Rugger Recoil Pad	Made In	China



We particularly liked the ergonomic forend.



The front sight is well suited to precision shooting with slugs.



Some of the raters preferred the traditional stock of the Hawk 982 shotgun.



The Ghost Ring rear sight gives a trained shooter the ability to deliver fast hits. The rear sight is well protected by metal wings.



Loading and unloading the Hawk 982 is nearly identical to the Remington 870, with a slight difference in the carrier.



We tested a variety of slugs and buckshot with excellent results. From top are Hornady's Varmint Express, Fiocchi 1-ounce Aero slugs, and Winchester 3-inch 12-gauge 00 buckshot loads.



Fiocchi birdshot was used in much of the testing and was easy on the shoulder.



Hornady Critical Defense 00 buckshot is a reduced-recoil load.



These are the results of three Fiocchi Aero slugs fired at 15 yards in the Hawk 982.

of the three, but worked fine in all of our testing. The trigger action is the nicest of the three shotguns tested at 4.5 pounds. The raters agreed that the simple front bead was plenty fast on target during rapid-fire combat shooting at 7, 10, and 16 yards. At useful buckshot range, the bead gave good results. The pattern was centered, just as the other Adaptive Tactical-equipped Remington had been. The muzzle brake may have helped with recoil, but we feel that the extra weight of the previous shotgun helped more.

The Express Tactical gave good results, with nothing to complain about. Patterns were the same as the other Remington 870. The muzzle brake did not affect either patterning or recoil very much. The jagged edge, intended to allow offset when using special munitions in door breaching, is a good touch but not one we have a mission for. The removable choke tube, however, is an advantage for those who may wish to turn the shotgun to area defense. Even for personal defense in the home, some of us would prefer a tight pattern. When moving to the Fiocchi slugs, the results were interesting. Perhaps the light trigger gave an advantage, but at 15 yards, the same excellent results were had, with two slugs in one ragged hole. Not quite the same group as the others, but for practical purposes, the bead-sighted gun is good to go with slugs at 15 yards. The slugs also struck to the point of aim.

Our Team Said: The Remington Express Tactical stock is slightly thicker than the Model 982, but not enough to make a difference in handling that we could discern. The recoil pad is solid, versus the vented pads of the other shotguns. The six-round magazine is another advantage we really like. But we rated the shotgun down a half grade based on the single bead sight, which would limit application at longer range.

IAC Hawk 982 12-Gauge Pump Action, \$233

This was our price for the gun from CheaperThanDirt.com. The IAC Hawk is nearly identical to the other shotguns. The slide action, safety, bolt release, and trigger are the same in appearance and function. The Hawk 982 is a direct copy of the Remington 870 made in China. The beginnings of this business date to 1960, when the original retail gun shop, know as Ivanhoe Sports Center, was located in Watertown, Massachusetts. It remained open for 25 years. A wholesale division was formed in 1974, and today is known as Interstate Arms Corp., a distributor supplying retail gun shops nationwide with firearms and accessories. IAC Imports is a division of Interstate Arms Corp. that imports reproductions of classic firearms.

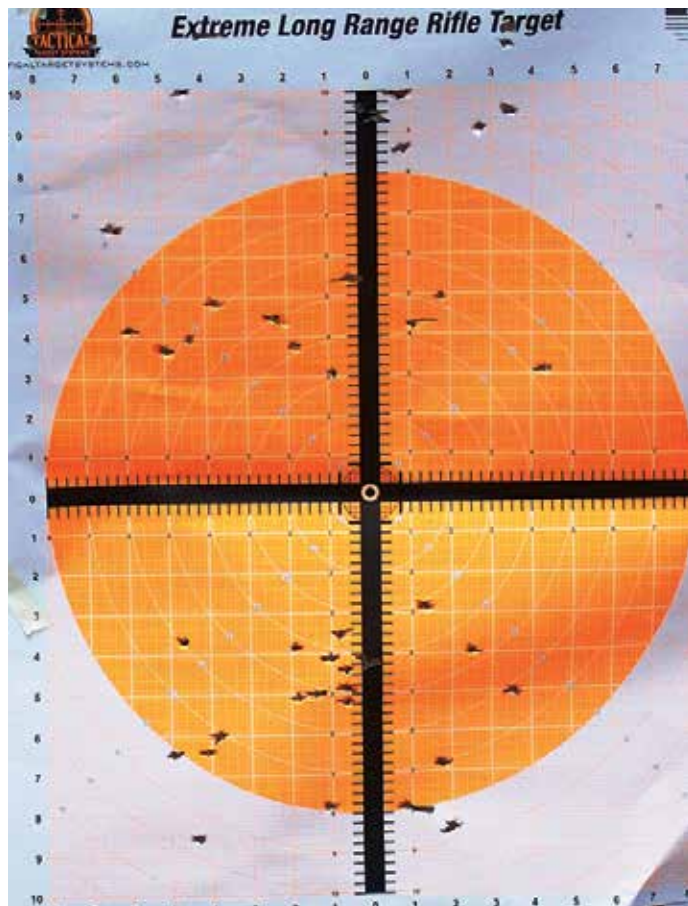
The 982 comes off well. The fit and finish are good. The blueing is attractive and evenly applied. The trigger action breaks at a clean 6 pounds, midway between the trigger-pull weight of the other shotguns. The Hawk features a 5-round magazine, also midway between the 4- and 6-shell capacity of the other shotguns. The

Hawk features synthetic furniture. The stock is slightly thinner than the Remington Express Tactical, but we could detect no advantage in either. The Hawk features a vented recoil pad, which we liked better than the Express Tactical shotgun's solid recoil pad. Recoil, however, was in the same category, we thought, with only the Adaptive Tactical-equipped shotgun showing an advantage in recoil control.

We liked the sweeping design of the forend on the Hawk better than the Remington Express. The hand isn't going to slip off the rear of this forend. The barrel is 18.5 inches versus 18 inches for the other shotguns. The real advantage of the Hawk 982, especially in this price range, was the aperture, or Ghost Ring, sights. This sight is adjustable and features solid wings to protect from falls. (Self-defense guns get beat up.) The front post is well suited to all-round use with buckshot or slugs. The action is smooth and free from binding. The only difference we could find in the Hawk and the Remington action is that the shell carrier of the Hawk does not have the small cut out in the carrier, which was designed to limit short cycles. In any case, there were no malfunctions of any of the shotguns used in this test. During the firing test, the Hawk 982 shotgun handled well. The 870 design moves quickly, and the stock design lends itself to fast handling. The 982 did not disappoint in this regard.

The Ghost Ring sight naturally centers the front post to the eye. In addressing targets at 7, 10, and 16 yards, the Hawk gave excellent results. When firing at close range with buckshot, one shotgun was about as good as the other; however, the Ghost Ring gave an advantage in speed, we thought.

The buckshot patterns were slightly tighter with the Hawk, which may have been an individual product of this shotgun, but were an inch or so tighter overall. When firing the shotguns with slugs, we had begun by firing two for practice to establish the point of impact and point-of-aim correlation. Then we fired three standing for a group, taking our time. One of the raters suggested firing five of the Fiocchi Aero slugs as quickly as possible for a group at 15 yards. We did so and found the rifle-sighted Remington was slower than the Hawk and less accurate, and the bead-sighted shotgun was even less accurate in rapid fire. The Hawk 982, however, placed the five slugs in a tight group, even when fired quickly. We think the Ghost Ring sight is a big advantage as a



These patterns are with the Hornady #4 Varmint load. The upper group was fired with the Remington 870 Express Tactical. The lower and tighter group was fired with the Hawk 982.

result. The slugs hit about 3 inches below the point of aim, but the shotgun sights had not been adjusted.

Our Team Said: We were impressed with the IAC Hawk 982. The shotgun performed flawlessly with good reliability. It handled quickly, and the recoil pad design was praised by all raters. The Ghost Ring sights are ideal for personal defense. The rear sight may be removed if you wish to mount a red dot sight. Function and tactical ability with the IAC Hawk 982 were excellent for the money. The Hawk 982 is a Best Buy.

*Written and photographed by R.K. Campbell, using evaluations from GUN TESTS team testers. **GT***

Used 38 Sp. Revolver Contest: Colt, Smith & Wesson, Ruger

We tested four double-action revolvers and found that all had appeal, but some made more sense than others — in particular, we think the S&W Military and Police is a working classic.

Revolvers make excellent home-defense handguns. They are simple to use and reliable and will come up shooting after long periods of storage. There are no springs compressed when the revolver is loaded, and no magazines to keep up with. The revolver may be chambered for powerful and efficient cartridges, such as the 38 Special +P and the 357 Magnum. For shooters able to engage in only minimal training, the revolver makes a lot of sense. Conversely, many very experienced shooters trust the revolver and little else. The smooth-rolling double-action trigger helps avoid flinch and the rhythm, once learned, allows excellent hit probability.

We set out to find four used revolvers for this Bargain Hunter segment. They had to be high quality and chambered for either the 38 Special or 357 Magnum cartridge, with the emphasis on 38 Special. While most homeowners will load these revolvers with 38 Special ammunition, the 357 Magnum is certainly a viable option, so we tested the revolvers chambered for the Magnum cartridge with these heavy loads as well. Because we were looking for bargains, we limited the used cost to a maximum of \$500 counter price. We found one



Right: Our tallest rater found the Ruger SP101 to be a good fit for his hands. A light, compact 357 Magnum revolver can be a formidable defensive handgun.



Right: The most controllable handgun was the Smith & Wesson Military and Police 38 Special.



Top: If you want a nice heavy-barrel 38 Special, the smooth Military and Police 38 Special was the best buy and most accurate revolver. Second from top: The Smith & Wesson Model 19 was well made, but it was quirky due to its skinny grips and heavy felt recoil with 357 Magnum loads. Second from bottom: The Colt Police Positive Special was at the bottom of the heap. Bottom: The Ruger SP101 is the only revolver of this quarter still in production, at least in its original form. For daily use, we would pick the Ruger SP101 based on ruggedness, control with heavy loads, compact frame size, and its ability to fire 357 Magnums. With a little hunting, there are similar bargains available at a gun show or used-gun counter near you.

revolver at that maximum and three for considerably less, including two revolvers at \$300. We chose medium-frame revolvers for two of the handguns and small frames for the other two handguns. Three were six-shot revolvers and one was a five-shooter. We elected not to pursue heavy-frame revolvers, such as the Smith &

38 SPECIAL RANGE DATA

Black Hills 38 Special D38N3 148-gr. Hollow Base Wadcutter (HBWC)

Average Velocity
Muzzle Energy
Smallest Group
Largest Group
Average Group Size

Colt PPS 38 Special

740 fps
179 ft.-lbs.
2.8 in.
3.6 in.
3.3 in.

Ruger SP101 357 Mag.

755 fps
187 ft.-lbs.
2.5 in.
3.3 in.
2.9 in.

S&W M&P 38 Special

770 fps
194 ft.-lbs.
1.8 in.
2.3 in.
2.0 in.

S&W M19 357 Mag.

726 fps
173 ft.-lbs.
2.3 in.
2.6 in.
2.4 in.

Winchester Super-X Cowboy Action 158-gr. Lead Flat Nose USA38CB

Average Velocity
Muzzle Energy
Smallest Group
Largest Group
Average Group Size

Colt PPS 38 Special

739 fps
191 ft.-lbs.
3.8 in.
4.5 in.
4.0 in.

Ruger SP101 357 Mag.

788 fps
217 ft.-lbs.
2.5 in.
3.5 in.
3.0 in.

S&W M&P 38 Special

801 fps
225 ft.-lbs.
2.3 in.
2.8 in.
2.5 in.

S&W M19 357 Mag.

760 fps
202 ft.-lbs.
2.6 in.
3.4 in.
2.9 in.

Hornady Critical Defense 38 Sp. +P 110-gr. FTX Hollowpoint 90311

Average Velocity
Muzzle Energy
Smallest Group
Largest Group
Average Group Size

Colt PPS 38 Special

955 fps
222 ft.-lbs.
3.0 in.
3.8 in.
3.4 in.

Ruger SP101 357 Mag.

970 fps
229 ft.-lbs.
2.3 in.
2.7 in.
2.4 in.

S&W M&P 38 Special

1038 fps
263 ft.-lbs.
1.9 in.
2.5 in.
2.3 in.

S&W M19 357 Mag.

998 fps
243 ft.-lbs.
2.0 in.
2.7 in.
2.4 in.

To collect accuracy data, we fired five-shot groups off a solid benchrest. Distance: 25 yards. We recorded velocities with a Competition Electronics Chrony Chronograph. The first sky screen was set 10 feet from the muzzle.

Ammunition notes: Black Hills Ammunition 148-grain HBWC D38N3, \$27/50 @ LuckyGunner.com; Hornady Critical Defense 38 Sp. +P 110-gr. FTX Hollowpoint 90311, \$19/25 @ MidwayUSA.com; Winchester Super-X Cowboy Action 158-gr. Lead Flat Nose USA38CB, \$37/50 @ TombstoneTactical.com.

Wesson L frame or Ruger GP100, and we also did not look for J-frame type snubnose revolvers. Basically, we were looking for affordable houseguns that would do a credible job of home defense if called upon. The contenders were as follows:

- **Colt Police Positive Special 38 Special, \$300.** The Colt PPS is a 4-inch-barrel double-action revolver. This revolver was introduced as a more powerful version of the Police Positive. The earlier revolver was chambered for various 32- and short 38-caliber cartridges. We turned down a similar Colt for less money that was much nicer, but which was chambered for the less powerful 38 Smith & Wesson cartridge. This old fat round lobs a 146-grain bullet at about 600 fps with modern loads, so we passed on it for home defense.

- **Smith & Wesson Military and Police 38 Special, ~\$300.** Smith & Wesson's double-action medium-frame revolver has been in production for more than 115 years. It is easily the most popular double-action revolver ever manufactured. The revolver is typical of handguns issued to harness cops from 1900 to the late 1980s. Our example was made in 1957. The revolver featured

a 4-inch barrel, and at some point, it had been fitted with plastic Safariland grips. These grips are no longer available. The grips were at least the equal of modern rubber grips in control and fit. A Hogue MonoGrip should give similar results if you want to regrip a Military and Police revolver for yourself.

- **Smith & Wesson Model 19 357 Magnum, \$500.** This is a powerful revolver in a now-uncommon barrel length. We thought that based on utility, the revolver was pricey, but then it was manufactured in 1977 and is very smooth — smoother than all the other revolvers. This revolver operated in the same manner as the Military and Police revolver; indeed, it is simply a Military and Police revolver with nice sights and a longer cylinder.

- **Ruger SP101 5718 357 Magnum, \$450.** This revolver lists new for \$719, and we saw a price for a new one at BudsGunShop.com for \$500. Our test revolver was purchased used at SCGunCo.com for \$450, making it the second-most expensive revolver tested. Considering we did not pay shipping and the revolver was as new, we probably saved about \$100. We saved a lot more with the Smith & Wesson revolvers over new price of

COLT POLICE POSITIVE SPECIAL 38 SPECIAL, ~\$300 GUN TESTS GRADE: C

If you like history, the Colt Police Positive Special is a cool gun. This revolver appeared original in all respects and has been operating since 1933. One of our raters writes for American Gunsmith, a sister publication to GUN TESTS, and he inspected the revolver. He believed all springs and parts in this wheelgun were original. As it turns out, research conducted after our shoot-out shows that the grip design was criticized even back in the day. Recoil was a problem, with the revolver squirming in the hand. Accuracy was less than the other handguns. This is a handgun best left in the showcase.



Action	Double Action	Frame Front Strap Height	2.4 in.
Overall Height	5.3 in.	Frame Back Strap Height	3.3 in.
Overall Length	7.0 in.	Grips	Plastic
Maximum Width	1.4 in.	Grip Thickness (max)	1.5 in.
Weight Unloaded	26 oz.	Grip Circumference (max)	5.1 in.
Weight Loaded	28.5 oz.	Front Sight	Fixed half moon
Barrel Length	4 in.	Rear Sight	Fixed notch
Capacity	6	Sight Radius	6.0 in.
Frame	Steel	Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	3.9 lbs.
Cylinder	Steel	Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	13.5 lbs.
		Trigger Span Single Action	2.6 in.
		Trigger Span Double Action	3.0 in.
		Safety	None
		Warranty	None, used gun
		Telephone	(800) 962-COLT
		Website	Colt.com
		Made In	USA



Even though it showed serious finish loss, the Colt was not corroded, which means it had a least received a wipe down from time to time. The old Colt was well worn, but tight.



The Colt thumb-rest grips shown protruding upward were okay because all of the raters were right handed. We'd advise lefties to check this particular grip for comfort before buying.



It is a tribute to Colt that the PPS revolver is still going after 83 years of service. The Colt gave good results off the barricade, but its greatest problem was recoil due to its skinny grips and light weight.

comparable revolvers, but then they are well used. The Ruger was the only stainless-steel handgun in this test. Here's how they performed:

Colt Police Positive Special 38 Special, \$300

The Colt PPS is a small-frame handgun. The finish of this revolver rated perhaps 50%. There was no corrosion, but little bluing was left. The bore and chambers were inspected and found to be functional. The action was smooth and even with no hitches. The Colt was fitted with special-order Colt grips with a thumb rest on the left grip. These are not super rare, but neither are they common. The grips were okay for shooting by righties, but they would be bad news for a left-handed shooter, we thought.

The Colt cylinder release pulls to the rear to disengage the cylinder for loading. The Colt indexes the cartridge to the left of the hammer, while the Smith & Wesson and Ruger revolvers index the cartridge to the right of the hammer first. This is something to be aware of if, like one of our raters, you keep a Glaser Safety Slug up first and then follow with standard JHP loads. In other words, the Colt rotates left to right, while the others rotate right to left when viewed from the rear.

The Colt had broad rear sights that were easily picked up in rapid fire. The front post was a half-round type typical of 1930s production. The Colt was manufactured in 1933. The question was, where is the top of the sight? This isn't the best front sight for precision use. The action was smooth, maybe even very smooth, but with a different feel than the other revolvers. The grip fit small hands well. While handfit was fine for most testers, as we learned during firing, this wasn't the best angle for firing heavy loads. During the firing test, we used three loads. These included the Black Hills Ammunition 148-grain wadcutter, the Hornady 110-grain Critical Defense FTX bullet, and the Winchester 158-grain cowboy load with a flat lead tip. The revolver

was originally rated for High Speed loads, and we had no qualm in firing +P loads. With the wadcutter loads, recoil was mild and manageable and remained so with the Winchester loads. With the +P load, recoil was more abrupt than the other handguns. The thin grips and light weight of the Colt were the culprits. We fired the Colt at silhouette targets at 5, 7, and 10 yards with five rounds of each load at each distance, for a total of 45 cartridges. By the last string, the +P loads began to sting a little. A set of Hogue or Pachmayr grips would have been a good addition. (Order for the Colt D frame or Detective Special.) Combat groups were acceptable, but they were the largest of the test. The times were slow as we recovered from recoil.

The sights were well regulated for 158-grain loads, and fired an inch or so low at 10 yards with the 110-grain JHP and a dead-on hold. Fired from a supported benchrest position, we learned the Colt was acceptably accurate for personal defense, but we would have liked better accuracy for hiking or field use and taking care of a dangerous reptile or perhaps potting small game. The best group of the day was 2.75 inches at 25 yards, but the average was much larger, with one load averaging 4 inches.

Our Team Said: Three years ago, we tested a PPS in better condition, but our evaluation then was similar to our opinions today: "The Colt was an interesting piece of history, but it has had its day. No doubt the revolver is quality construction made in bygone era, and it proved its accuracy. But testers felt they would rather have the S&W." This time around, we bought the Colt with a budget in mind, and we found it was light enough for concealed carry as well as a home-defense handgun. It was more difficult to use well than the short-barrel revolvers tested, and we found it was much more difficult to fire well than the Smith & Wesson Military and Police revolver. We rated the Colt down for its recoil and poor accuracy in comparison to the others.

Smith & Wesson Military and Police 38 Special, ~\$300

The action was very tight and

SMITH & WESSON MILITARY AND POLICE 38 SPECIAL, \$300

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

This revolver is large enough to soak up the recoil of +P loads but remains light enough for fast handling. It delivered better combat accuracy and better slow-fire accuracy than any other revolver in this test. At less than half the price of a new Model 10, the Military and Police 38 is a great revolver. If you find one at a fair price, grab it.



Action	Double Action
Overall Length	8.9 in.
Overall Height	5.8 in.
Maximum Width	1.5 in.
Weight Unloaded	34.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	36.5 oz.
Barrel Length	4 in.
Capacity	6
Frame	Steel, K-frame

Cylinder	Steel
Frame Front Strap Height	2.2 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	4.2 in.
Grips	Plastic Aftermarket (Obsolete)
Grip Thickness (Max.)	1.2 in.
Grip Circumference (Max.)	5.5 in.
Front Sight	Ramp type, fixed
Rear Sight	Fixed
Sight Radius	6.1 in.
Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	3.5 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	12 lbs.
Trigger Span Single Action	2.6 in.
Trigger Span Double Action	3.25 in.
Safety	None
Warranty	None
Telephone	(800) 331-0852
Website	Smith-Wesson.com
Made In	U.S.A.





The finish of the Military and Police revolver was generally good, with a bit of muzzle wear.

The fixed sights didn't hamper accurate shooting. The front sight was a ramp that was easy to see. The Smith & Wesson action staged well, allowing the shooter to move the hammer almost to the firing point and then continuing with the press.

The action was very tight and smooth. The bore and chambers were in excellent condition.

smooth in operation. The bore and chambers were in excellent condition. The sights were good

examples of fixed sights. The front sight was a ramp that allows accurate fire. The Smith & Wesson action lends

SMITH & WESSON MODEL 19 357 MAGNUM, ~\$500 GUN TESTS GRADE: C

The Model 19 is a great-shooting short-barrel revolver, but the short barrel is a drawback compared to the Military and Police revolver. The square-butt frame of the larger 38 Special also gave better control than the 357 Magnum Model 19's round butt. When we fired Magnums in the Model 19, the situation became worse. While the Model 19 Combat Magnum is a fine revolver, it is a specialist's handgun, and one most of us will find too expensive for the performance delivered.



Action	Double Action
Overall Length	7.4 in.
Overall Height	5.8 in.
Maximum Width	1.5 in.
Weight Unloaded	35.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	37.5 oz.
Barrel Length	2.5 in.
Capacity	6
Frame	Steel, K Frame

Cylinder Material	Steel
Frame Front Strap Height	2.2 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	4.2 in.
Grips	Wood
Grip Thickness Max	1.2 in.
Grip Circumference Max	5.2 in.
Front Sight	Ramp type, fixed with orange insert
Rear Sight	Adjustable
Sight Radius	4.6 in.
Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	4.0 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	12.0 lbs.
Trigger Span Single Action	2.6 in.
Trigger Span Double Action	3.25 in.
Safety	None
Warranty	None
Telephone	(800) 331-0852
Website	Smith-Wesson.com
Made In	U.S.A.



The Model 19's adjustable sights were useful for getting the revolver to shoot where the owner aimed. The others didn't offer this ease of use.



A ramp front sight with orange insert made for good shooting both at the combat range and in precision shooting.



Fired off hand, the Smith & Wesson Combat Magnum gave credible results, but concentration is always demanded by a short-barrel revolver.

itself well to staging, bringing the hammer almost to the firing point and then continuing with the press.

The cylinder release presses forward to open the cylinder. The cylinder rotated right to left. The finish of the Military and Police revolver was generally good, with a bit of muzzle wear. The Smith & Wesson weighed more than the Colt, but this is an advantage in home defense use versus concealed carry. It is recoil-soaking weight, and 34 ounces isn't heavy for occasional carry. With good weight and balance, a 4-inch barrel and a smooth action, we expected the Smith & Wesson to be a good shooter.

On the firing range results were excellent in combat fire. The revolver was more comfortable to fire than the Colt, the Ruger, or the other Smith & Wesson revolver. Combat accuracy was excellent. The single smallest grouping was with the Black Hills Ammunition 148-grain wadcutter. At a long 25 yards, the Military and Police settled five shots into 1.75 inches.

Our Team Said: Easy to use well but powerful enough for personal defense, the Smith & Wesson Military and Police impressed all raters. Absolute accuracy was the best of the test, despite the excellent sights and smooth action of the Model 19 we also fired. Other guns, such as the Combat Masterpiece and other target-sighted 38s, may offer better accuracy, but the practical Military and Police revolver is more affordable and its intrinsic accuracy just as good. This revolver is a Best Buy and is our pick of the four revolvers tested here.

Smith & Wesson Model 19 357 Magnum, \$500

The Smith & Wesson adjustable sights were very nice, allowing perfect sighting in with proper adjustment. That is a good feature, because, as purchased, the sights were ramped up so far the revolver fired 4 inches high at 7 yards. It was a simple matter to adjust them for the proper elevation. The ramp front-post sight allows excellent accuracy and a high hit probability. For all-round use, these are the best sights ever

fitted to a revolver, in the opinion of our raters.

This revolver was finished in nickel. While it was overall nice in

RUGER SP101 5718 KSP321X 357 MAGNUM, \$450 GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

The Ruger SP101 is a light handgun, but it gave a firing impressions similar to the larger revolvers. Powerful and accurate, the Ruger has a lot going for it. It is the only revolver tested currently in production in its original form. For a combination of carry and home defense, the Ruger gets high marks. The larger revolvers simply outshot it. For those with small hands, it is a very good choice.



Action	Double Action
Overall Height	4.8 in.
Overall Length	7.2 in.
Maximum Width	1.35 in.
Weight Unloaded	26 oz.
Weight Loaded	28.2 oz.
Barrel Length	2.25 in.
Capacity	5
Frame	Stainless, small frame
Cylinder	Stainless steel

Frame Front Strap Height	1.8 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.3 in.
Grips	Rubber and plastic, ribbed sides
Grip Thickness (Max.)	1.24 in.
Grip Circumference (Max.)	4.5 in.
Front Sight	Fixed
Rear Sight	Fixed
Sight Radius	3.6 in.
Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	5.0 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	14.0 lbs.
Trigger Span Single Action	2.4 in.
Trigger Span Double Action	2.95 in.
Safety	None
Warranty	No Written Warranty
Telephone	(336) 949-5200
Website	Ruger.Com
Made In	U.S.A.



The Galco Carry Lite holster gave good results when packing the compact Ruger revolver. For ammunition suitable for the SP101 and the S&W Model 19 in 357 Magnum, please consult the ammunition test on page 29.



The Magnum revolvers tested were the Ruger SP 101, in stainless steel, top, and the nickel-plated S&W M19 357 Magnum, bottom. Stout and reliable, the Ruger SP101 has a lot going for it. The S&W Model 19 was perhaps the nicest revolver to use and handle due to a smooth action and high-profile adjustable sights, but it wasn't the best shooter.

appearance, the nickel was flaking in some areas. The revolver featured a round-butt frame and came fitted with the original grips. The grips were adequate when firing 38 Special loads, but squirmed when firing the Magnum load tested on a limited basis. Both the Ruger SP101 and the Smith & Wesson Military and Police revolver were easier to control with 38 Special +P loads. The short barrel proved plenty accurate for slow-fire work. During the firing stage, we added a 357 Magnum load for comparison in the Ruger SP101. The Cor-Bon 110-grain JHP is intended as a personal-defense load and offers less recoil than heavier 125- to 158-grain Magnum loads. During the firing string, we fired the same loads in 38 Special on the combat course. The results were good, equal to the Military and Police revolver with all three loads. However, the 357 Magnum load was a bear. The skinny grips were not the best for this type of work. The revolver shifted in the hands. Some raters had to adjust the grip after every shot. This is the personal gun of one of the raters, and he added a set of custom grips from Brownells.com. The Hideout revolver grips are only \$19, but they add much more control to the revolver. And this modification was needed. But we did not figure these grips into the rating because the revolver was purchased without these grips.

In absolute accuracy, the Smith & Wesson Model 19 came in second behind the Military and Police revolver. The Model 19's best group was 1.9 inches with the Hornady 110-grain Critical Defense load.

Our Team Said: We rated the Model 19 down a full grade based on its price as tested. We do not feel that \$500 for a used revolver is a good deal compared to the modest cost of the 38 Special revolvers and a new Ruger 357 Magnum revolver. We did not rate performance with the 357 Magnum rounds because the test centered upon the 38 Special cartridge, but the Ruger offered better control with the Magnum load. Also, during the test, the Model 19's ejector rod became loose and had to be tightened, standard operating procedure for

BARGAIN HUNTER



used Smith & Wesson revolvers and more common problem with 357 Magnum revolvers than 38 Special-only versions.

Ruger SP101 5718 357 Magnum, \$450

We feel that stainless is a big plus if you can get it in a handgun you like. The Ruger was fairly compact, the smallest revolver tested, although the Police Positive Special was close. The Ruger featured a cylinder latch that must be pressed in to release the cylinder. We had no real preferences in cylinder-latch operation, all worked well. The Ruger seemed to be the most modern revolver, with less to go wrong. The Ruger cylinder rotated in Smith & Wesson fashion. The sights were good, broad shapes well suited to personal defense. The front sight was pinned into place and may be replaced if desired.

The Ruger was handled and safely dry fired, along with the other revolvers, before heading to the range. The Ruger had a different feel to the action. It was sturdy but not as smooth as the Smith & Wesson revolvers. The heavy barrel was a plus. There was a spring-loaded pin

Left to right: To open these revolvers, press in the cylinder latch on the SP101, pull back the cylinder latch on the Colt, and press forward the cylinder latch on the S&W Model 19.

in the crane that aids in locking the cylinder tight. This is a Ruger design that we feel adds to the accuracy of some Ruger handguns, such as the Ruger GP100. It was nice to have in the compact SP101 as well.

During firing strings, the Ruger was much more comfortable to fire than the Colt and was as comfortable to fire as either Smith & Wesson revolver, though some felt the larger Smith & Wesson with its Safariland grips was easier to shoot well. During the combat course, the Ruger did well, with results we rated better than the

Colt. It was close to the heavier target-sighted Model 19. The Smith & Wesson Military and Police outshot the Ruger SP101, in our estimation.

We fired the Ruger with the Cor-Bon 110-grain defense load and came to a surprising conclusion. The short, stout Ruger was more controllable than the larger Smith & Wesson Model 19. Grip design has a lot to do with this, but the Ruger was simply more comfortable to fire with Magnum loads due to its geometry and design.

Firing from a solid benchrest firing position, the Ruger SP101 proved accurate enough for any foreseeable chore. It was more accurate than the Colt. The Ruger lagged behind each Smith & Wesson revolver for accuracy. This is to be expected considering the advantages of the target-sighted Model 19 and the longer-barreled Military and Police revolver.

Our Team Said: We rated the Ruger down a grade because it had only a five-shot capacity versus six shots in the others, a sizable edge for a home-defense firearm. We demoted it another half grade on accuracy.

*Written and photographed by R.K. Campbell, using evaluations from GUN TESTS team testers. **GT***