

rendering the gun inoperative. This goes beyond the original argument for DA/SA guns in the first place and even makes possible safe storage by merely separating the mags from the gun, with or without the seventh round in the chamber (capacity is 6+1).

At the bench this heavy trigger pull was detrimental to shooting small groups. On a rest the trigger becomes tiring very quickly. Plus the three-dot combat sights were small and wearying to use for fine shooting. In our first practical test of two shots from low ready at 7 yards we again wished for a larger front sight. However, our two-shot drills proved the

most consistent of the pistols. No, we didn't have any spectacular sub 1-inch groups, but we didn't have the big 3- or 4-inch plus crashes either.

Groups measured in order, 1.4, 1.8, 2.4, 1.1, 2.9, 1.9, 3.0, and 1.3 inches.

Even with this in the book we were surprised to find that our last test of rapid fire at 10 yards yielded 35 out of 50 shots (70 percent) in the black.

On the reliability front, the Smith had the least trouble feeding the 200-grain lead semi-wadcutters. While new, (fewer than 150 rounds) it missed bringing the 200-grain semi-wadcutters completely into battery by 0.25 inches or less on three different occasions. By the end of the test (400+ rounds) no such malfunctions occurred. Sights provided are of the Novak three-dot design. The rear sight is windage adjustable and locks into place via an Allen screw. Grips are a plastic wraparound design that has become Smith & Wesson's trademark. Checkering is molded into the back strap and cut mildly in to the front-strap portion of the steel frame.

This may not be an especially light-weight gun, but its heft is more than acceptable. This pistol is quite trim

Accuracy & Chronograph Data

	Beretta Cougar 8045F	Sig Sauer P225	Smith & Wesson 4553
Winchester 230-grain FMJ			
Average Velocity at 10 ft.	744 fps	773 fps	747 fps
Standard Deviation	2 fps	13 fps	5 fps
Muzzle Energy	283 ft.-lbs.	305 ft.-lbs.	285 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group at 25 yds.	3.2 in.	1.6 in.	3.2 in.
Largest Group Size	4.2 in.	2.5 in.	4.2 in.
Average Group Size	3.6 in.	2.1 in.	3.7 in.
Black Hills 185-grain JHP			
Average Velocity at 10 ft.	889 fps	894 fps	928 fps
Standard Deviation	15 fps	6 fps	12 fps
Muzzle Energy	325 ft.-lbs.	328 ft.-lbs.	354 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group at 25 yds.	2.4 in.	2.3 in.	2.4 in.
Largest Group Size	2.8 in.	2.8 in.	3.3 in.
Average Group Size	2.6 in.	2.6 in.	2.9 in.
Black Hills 200-grain SWC			
Average Velocity at 10 ft.	851 fps	852 fps	846 fps
Standard Deviation	15 fps	27 fps	10 fps
Muzzle Energy	322 ft.-lbs.	322 ft.-lbs.	318 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group at 25 yds.	2.3 in.	2.5 in.	1.7 in.
Largest Group Size	4.7 in.	2.6 in.	3.4 in.
Average Group Size	3.8 in.	2.6 in.	2.5 in.

and devoid of any levers or sharp edges. There's nothing fancy about it. It looks like its short narrow grip would promote uncontrollable recoil, but it recoils less than the Beretta with all of its fancy engineering. In our view, the mags blend into the frame, and although a set of alternate base pads with grip extension are supplied, we found them superfluous.

Gun Tests Recommends

● **Sig Sauer P245, \$845.** Conditional buy. Its MSRP includes an additional \$95 for the luminous Siglite sights, but we feel it is overpriced. Although it was the most accurate of our group from a rest when shot single-action only, this pistol was difficult to shoot unsupported past short combat distances. Contributing factors were a glaring front-sight blade and recoil that disrupts trigger control. Unless all your guns are of DA/SA or better yet, all Sigs, you may not be able to keep up the training necessary to adequately defend yourself.

✕ **Beretta Cougar 8045F, \$719.** Don't Buy. Despite its comfortable grip, heavy weight and fancy engineering that ups the price, the 8045F

recoils heavily. It might feel more coordinated as a double-action-only pistol. Ultimately, only one of our testers liked this gun and his enthusiasm flagged as it displayed only mediocre accuracy.

✓ **Smith & Wesson 4553TSW, \$781.** Buy it. At this price, Smith & Wesson makes life simple. Where other guns performed at the bench, we found that this pistol performs best when fired off-hand. This all-steel pistol is well balanced to distribute recoil evenly, making it comfortable to shoot even the heavier .45 loads. For those with faith in no-

thing but revolvers, here is a 6+1 option in .45 ACP that offers a single, consistent trigger with the shortest learning curve demanding the least remedial training. ●

Contacts

Beretta U.S.A. Corp.

17601 Beretta Dr.
Accokeek, MD 20607
Telephone (301) 283-2191
Fax (301) 283-0435
www.berettausa.com

Sigarms Inc.

Corporate Park
Exeter, NH 03833
Telephone (603) 772-2302
Fax (603) 772-9082
www.sigarms.com

Smith & Wesson

2100 Roosevelt Ave.
Springfield, MA 01102-2208
Telephone (800) 331-0852
Telephone (413) 781-8300
Fax (413) 731-8980
www.smith-wesson.com