

and as the gun broke in we could shoot more and more lead before breaking the gun down for service.

Over the course of our testing, the double-action broke in so nicely we wished it would operate DA only. We think even though the single-action trigger is not bad, the position of the trigger in this mode is so far rearward in the trigger guard that it disrupted the natural ergonomics of the pistol. A trigger span matched with the width of the frame is more conducive to a strong energized pull typically characteristic of double action than the fine placement of the pad of the index finger commonly used for single action.

Although the Cougar series pistol is now available in an even smaller package and referred to as a compact model by Beretta (the Mini-Cougar), our model 8045F shared the same "box-size" as the other pistols in this test. We liked the 8+1 capacity and overall feel of the gun, despite it being the heavyweight in the test. It is our opinion that this is the optimum frame size for a pistol of this design.

The Cougar series pistols are distinguished from the other Berettas by a rotating barrel that, upon firing, travels and rotates with axial movement. According to the Beretta: "By channeling part of the recoil energy into barrel rotation, and by partially absorbing the barrel and slide recoil shock through the central block before it is transferred to the frame, the Cougar achieves unusually low felt recoil." Actually, our testers found the recoil moderately heavy to heavy. In fact, it wasn't until we added the grip tape that the word "moderate" appeared in our survey.

The Cougar 8045F showed a marked preference for the lighter 185-grain bullets. However, it did little to distinguish itself in any of our tests, no matter how much we enjoyed shooting it. In reference to alternate methods of fire, its trigger responded best to the "click" method referred to earlier. Of the guns tested, it is the only pistol other than the Sig that enables the shooter to carry a round in the chamber with the hammer down and pull the hammer back on

SMITH & WESSON 4553TSW
Price....\$781

Our recommendation:
Conditional Buy. Although it has everything it takes to be a good fighting machine, it's just not as accurate as we would like.

SPECIFICATIONS

WARRANTY Lifetime

SLIDE FINISH ... Satin Stainless

FRAME FINISH .. Satin Stainless

FRAME MATERIAL Steel

WEIGHT 36 oz.

CAPACITY 6+1

GRIP MATERIAL Plastic

ACTION TYPE Double

TRIGGER PULL DA 12 lbs.

the way to mounting the gun for access to single action.

Swiping is out of the question due to the ambidextrous de-cocking/safety levers mounted on the slide. Their forward surface is so square and abrupt that we winced each time we had to rack the slide. Manipulating these levers also forced the shooter to use the weak hand so that one's grip is completely out of position should the need to fire arise.

Offering a DA only model would in our opinion likely gloss over many of the shortcomings mentioned above.

Smith & Wesson 4553TSW

Our recommendation: The price makes this \$781 gun a contender.

It is easy to shoot and performs well off the bench.

If it wasn't so going into this test, the feeling that one consistent trigger action beats two of any kind is now obvious. The Smith & Wesson 4553TSW was the only pistol in the test to feature a single mode of fire. The 4553TSW fires double-action only and its pull is the heaviest of any gun in this test. The only safety on the pistol (save for the handler's discretion) is disengagement, where even if a round is in the chamber, the hammer will not fall if the mag is removed or ajar. It is on record that during the struggle for retention of a firearm the owner has defeated the intent of the assailant by pushing the mag release,