GUN TESTS®

THE CONSUMER RESOURCE FOR THE SERIOUS SHOOTER

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5 COMPACT 9MMS

Tested: Bersa BP9MCC, Honor Defense Honor Guard FIST, Taurus G2S, Smith & Wesson Shield, and Ruger EC9S. We liked all of these handguns, but only one is a Best Buy. ● Page 6



38 SPECIAL LEVER-ACTION RIFLES

We tested three timeless beauties: Taylor's & Company 1873 Comanchero, the Cimarron Model 1866 Yellow Boy Short Rifle, and Uberti's Model 1873 Competition. Which one won our hearts? ● Page 20



HEAVY 9MM LOADS

We selected 135- to 160-grain rounds from Hornady, Federal, Buffalo Bore, Remington, Winchester, Fiocchi, DoubleTap, and SIG Sauer. After bullets smashed water jugs, we found a lot to like, but only one Best Buy. ● Page 28

DOWNRANGE: 2 ● FIRING LINE: 3 ● COMING UP: 32

DOWNRANGE

SHORT SHOTS



Todd Woodard

One of the changes I've seen in the firearms industry over the years is the timing of new-product introductions. Formerly, most companies rolled out their new lines at the end or the very beginning of the calendar year, in both cases to time with each year's Shooting Hunting & Outdoor Trade Show, better known as SHOT Show, generally held in January. That always seemed odd to me because it guaranteed new-product coverage would get trampled by the volume of similar coverage. The situation has changed quite a lot, especially in the last five years. Many new products are now introduced at what is effectively a consumer show — the NRA Annual Meetings, usually held in May — rather than the industry-only SHOT Show. Also, as more companies disperse their new-product announcements via their own media — blogs, e-letters, and social media, as well as press releases to their retailers, who also have blogs and social media — the companies can roll out new products as the goods become available for shipment.

This is an important shift for consumers because it used to be SOP for a company to do a soft introduction of a product to a limited class of gun publications, then assess the market response generated by the publicity before committing to a full production run. That sometimes lead to product news being publicized two or three years in advance of product being available for sale, or the products never materialized, both of which customers didn't like. Now, what you can see, you can generally get.

I want to thank Gun Tests readers for participating in a recent online survey in which we asked for guidance on what subscribers want to see. We're still looking over the data and making coverage plans, but I've been able to make some adjustments on the fly already, which you can see in this issue. You asked for more and larger pictures, so I've expanded the modules. Also, I've cut duplication in the text where we documented some of the test procedures in both the narrative and the sidebars. Overall, we'll trend toward a tighter, better-illustrated package in the coming months.

In terms of coverage, there were some surprises. You want more legal reporting, such as features on legal self-defense use, which ranked as high in the survey as coverage of self-defense handguns. I have already begun assigning pieces on those issues. Ammunition testing also turned up as a prime area of interest. After all, guns can't go bang if they're empty.

I know that the survey was long. I took it myself on my iPhone. But for those thousands of readers who slogged through even part of it, please accept my thanks. It will help me craft a better product for you to read.

GUN TESTS CREDO

REMEMBER: BE SAFE, BE SECURE, BE AWARE

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What About the Ithaca Pump?

Reader Cliff touts this as an alternative to the shotguns we reviewed last month. So we bring everybody else up to speed. Reader 'HMark' doesn't like stuff hanging off self-defense guns.

Re "Home-Defense Shotguns: Are Magazine-Feds the New Thing?" October 2018

I received my copy and enjoyed the article. I was curious as to why you did not include the Ithaca Model 37 Defender? I have seen your past report for this gun. Your people evaluating the shotgun gave the Ithaca the very top choice. Yes, I know it's more expensive — but the walnut stock, walnut corncob forend, the best trigger, and old-fashioned high quality build, when added to the home defense purpose, made it my choice. **— Cliff**

Hey Cliff: We wanted as close a match in execution from the mag-feds to the tube-feds as made sense. Also, it was five guns and 12 pages as it was, so that's a pretty big commitment. But here's a quick look back at the Ithaca, reviewed in the May 2009 issue. "The Ithaca Model 37 Defense Gun Eight Shot 3-inch 12 Gauge is the high-capacity 20-inch-barrel model, able to hold seven shells in the magazine plus one in the chamber. The buttstock is uncheckered walnut, finished off with a nicely ground, black Pachmayr Decelerator recoil pad. The external metal finishes of this home-defense shotgun are Parkerized; the barrel is a plain barrel with a brass bead at the muzzle. We felt the Parkerized finish was extremely well-done and evenly applied. The walnut forearm is a big, beefy honey-dipper or corn-cob type, currently designated as a ring-tail forearm by Ithaca. We were instantly impressed with the steady grip and control this forearm gave us. The gun itself weighs 6.75 pounds, with a trigger that was exceptionally crisp, breaking at 4 pounds on the nose. Unlike many wingshooting versions of the Model 37, the Ithaca defense model is not a take-down version. It has a solid frame with the barrel permanently threaded into its all-steel receiver, similar to that employed by the Ithaca Deerslayer II and III. It is a very strong system, as solid threads are obviously stronger than interrupted threads of the same length. By virtue of the bottom-loading and bottom-eject action, the M37 goes a long way toward being ambidextrous. The Ithaca Model 37 was the best-built, smoothest, best-balanced shotgun in the test. It also had the best trigger, and it was fastest and most user-friendly to operate." — *Todd Woodard*



Ithaca Model 37 Defense Gun

Wow, talk about coincidence. I'd been considering picking up the Mossberg 590M because I have a 500 which I really like. Thanks for the heads-up concerning its failures. I won't be purchasing one. Last week, I was also checking out the Chinese

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.

version of the Saiga, the JTS M12AK, on the Brownells website and thought the price was right compared to what I paid for my Saiga, $800+ after I added the features to it that are found on the JTS. Of course, I couldn't add a magwell to my Saiga. One of the problems I have with my Saiga is that it won't cycle low-brass shells, so I'm wondering if the four-position gas adjustment on the JTS allows for that. I understand from various websites that a Saiga can be modified to run with low-brass shells, but the modification involves taking a grinder/wire wheel to the operating surfaces of the bolt, carrier, and some of the inside surfaces. I do not have the confidence to make these modifications, so my Saiga can only reliably fire high-brass loads, and that is painful to both my shoulder and pocketbook. The other problem I've heard about and read about that happens to Saigas is that they eventually shoot themselves apart.

I have put about 100 shells through my Saiga and haven't noticed any problems, but I understand that 100 shells is not a significant amount of ammo. Do you think the JTS will suffer from the same lack of durability? It's my understanding, once again from other gun publications, when I was looking at buying a Norinco Type 99 versus an AK, that the Chinese make better firearms than the Russians do. So I'm wondering if this is true when discussing shotguns? Maybe sometime you could test the Saiga, the JTS M12AK, and some brand of AR-15 style shotgun against one another? I consider my Saiga to be a home-defense shotgun. There is no way I would lug my 12-pound Saiga any distance. **— Scott**

Hey Scott: That's a lot to unpack. We shy away from commenting on other sources' reviews, good or bad. We test our guns, write that up, and tend to our own knitting. But I'm certainly willing to review and publish other readers' direct experiences with their shotguns. I trust Gun Tests *readers to give other readers the straight skinny on how their personal guns perform. Sorry to rain on the 590M's parade, but we test, report, and you decide what to buy. — tw*

My perspective: Detachable magazines and pistol grips add extra "appendages" to a firearm that is otherwise highly maneuverable. These extra protrusions can snag clothing and require more space. Maybe okay for some, but just not for me. **— HMark on Gun-Tests.com**



Re "Lead Fouling Removal," Gun-Tests.com

Read your article, interesting. I always set the barrel in the bottle solvent for while, then flip it over in there for the same amount of time. Came out great with a copper bore brush. Saw a video once with Bill Wilson in which he was instructing on 45 ACP pistol maintenance. He used a small piece of copper cut from a copper dish-scouring pad. Looked like it worked great. I prefer Lube 1 for cleaning or Ballistol Lubricant. Love your articles. **— Richard**

Readers who aren't signed up for our Straight Shooter e-letter might have missed this. To read it, do a DuckDuckGo search for "lead fouling removal gun tests" and the link will pop up as the first item. I don't use Google any longer, so I can't say where it appears in that platform's search. — tw

Re "Firing Line," October 2018

Saw the letter from Dean asking for an article on electronic hearing protection. Be sure to consider adequate amplification for those of us using hearing aids. Also, please tell your readers that the button on top of the baseball hats we sometimes wear can be removed. Diagonal cutters will do the job and will make wearing headband protectors much more comfortable. Also, please make note that more protection is needed on enclosed spaces (indoors, when using barrels on some USPSA stages, etc.) and for younger shooters. Don't make: "WHAT?" your favorite word as you age! — Nick

Wow. Great points. Thank you for sharing them. — tw

Re "Double-Action 357 Magnums: Ruger & S&W Revolvers Tested," Sept. 2018

Kudos for reviewing the Taurus Model 66 6-inch .357! I appreciate your reviewing the older, sometimes used, models of firearms. I look forward every time to your unbeatable reviews and articles! **— West**



Re "Two Over-The-Counter Exotics from Mossberg and Century" October 2017

I love Gun Tests! Hoping you have some answers for me. I want to purchase a new Mossberg Shockwave. Intended use is protection while on my live-aboard boat. I have a physical issue, torn rotator cuff, unrepairable, in my right shoulder, which has forced me to give up all long guns. I am now restricted to the use of handguns, and the Shockwave looks like it might be the perfect solution as it is not a shoulder-mounted weapon. The questions are: 1) Which will have less felt recoil, the 20 gauge shooting 00 buck or the 12 gauge shooting reduced recoil/mini shells? 2) Has the adapter for using mini shells you used when you tested the Shockwave continued to function properly? Hopefully, you will have the answers or know where I can find them. **— Bruce**







Hey Bruce: The Aguila Mini-Shells have far less recoil than 20-gauge rounds, depending on which rounds you choose, of course. And the adapter continues to work fine. I would recommend you select a Shockwave with a corrosion-resistant finish, such as the 590 Shockwave FDE Cerakote 50653. This has a Flat Dark Earth Cerakote protective coating on the barrel, mag tube, and receiver MSRP: $504. Or, even better in my opinion, the 590 JIC Shockwave 50656. It comes in a durable, water-resistant tube and has a Cerakote Stainless non-reflective finish on exposed metalwork. MSRP: $647. I would caution you to be sure about local ownership of these shotguns, however. Although the Mossberg 590 Shockwave is classified as a "firearm" under the Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA), and is not subject to the provisions of the National Firearms Act (NFA), state and local laws may be more restrictive. While it is legal federally, the 590 Shockwave may be considered a "short-barreled" shotgun or "assault weapon" by certain state and local laws and, therefore, is illegal to possess. So, if your boat is moored in a coastal state, most of which are Infringed Rights jurisdictions, you might be making a mistake. Just be sure before you jump. Also, I'd encourage you to watch a video by Clint Smith, current president and director of the Thunder Ranch training facility in Lakeview, Oregon, about using these shotguns for self-defense. Big takeaway: Don't put them in front of your face. A search on YouTube or on the web for "Shockwave Thunder Ranch" will take you to the right spot. — tw

Osprey Suppressor Use

I think you reviewed the Osprey suppressor before you began its use as a test platform, so you may have answered my question and I am unable to recall. I have the Osprey Micro and enjoy it thoroughly. There is one drawback I see with eccentric cans, and I wonder if you've experienced it with your Osprey. Timing. I find repeatability to be a challenge. I can add the proper shims and have the silencer timed just right so the bulky part is at 6 o'clock; then after cleaning and reassembly, it points off to the side. Perhaps with the rimfires it is a bigger problem because the threaded barrel adapter adds another set of threads that need to be timed consistently in addition to the suppressor mount. What is your experience with the Osprey (or other eccentrics) in this regard? **— Paul**

Hey Paul: Actually, we haven't done a side-by-side comparison test of suppressors. We simply chose the Osprey 45 because it could be used on several calibers of handguns and rifles. We've chosen to buy the correct pistons for each use, and haven't seen timing problems at all. It's pretty easy, in fact. — tw

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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

9mm Slim Line Compact Pistol Shoot-out: Five Go Head To Head

Tested: Bersa BP9MCC, Honor Defense Honor Guard FIST, Taurus G2S, Smith & Wesson Shield, and Ruger EC9s. We liked all of these handguns, but we called one a Best Buy.

Close in importance to the most basic needs — food, water, and shelter — is the ability to protect yourself from threats. Concealable, compact, and powerful handguns give us peace of mind in a dangerous world. There is no doubt there are more effective cartridges than the 9mm Luger, but the 9mm is far more powerful than any 32 ACP or 380 Auto cartridge, and it holds more rounds than a compact 38 Special revolver. The 9mm is a powerful cartridge with good performance that will get the job done, given adequate shot placement. A compact handgun with good sights, a decent trigger, and ergonomic controls is a stalwart companion in difficult times. So we tested a quintet side by side to get an idea about what we would buy, then relay those impressions to Gun Tests readers. The pistols tested are unique in many ways, but they share a few common features. Takedown, trigger action, and slide-lock designs differ. Each may fit your needs more than the others, but there are a couple at the top of the heap. Our test handguns chambered in 9mm Luger were the following:

- *Bersa BP9MCC, $295;*
- *Honor Defense Honor Guard HG9SCF FIST, $400;*
- *Ruger EC9s 3283, $231;*
- *S&W M&P9 Shield Battleworn Coating, $250; and*
- *Taurus G2S 1-G2S931, $204.*



Top: The Bersa BC9MCC featured an excellent trigger. Middle: The Honor Defense Honor Guard FIST pistol was among the most combat-capable handguns we have ever tested. Only the Honor Guard pistol featured forward cocking serrations on the slide. Bottom: The Taurus G2S was quite controllable despite its light weight. As we poured ammo through them, the Bersa, Honor Guard, and Taurus G2S 9mm pistols floated to the top of the heap during the test. Note the frame treatments for each pistol are different, but all worked well.

Bersa BP9MCC 9mm Luger, $295

Above is our price from BudsGunShop.com. BP9MCC stands for Bersa Pistol 9mm Concealed Carry. When we ordered the BP9MCC, there were price variations as high as $313, but those models differed only in frame color. We could have had a nickel-plated slide for three more dollars, which may have been a good deal. We chose the least expensive product.

Bersa enjoys an excellent reputation for its small double-

RANGE DATA

Jesse James Ammo Inc. 124-gr. JHP	Bersa BP9MCC	Honor Defense FIST	Ruger EC9s	Smith & Wesson Shield	Taurus G2S
Average Velocity	1001 fps	980 fps	967 fps	999 fps	980 fps
Muzzle Energy	275 ft.-lbs.	264 ft.-lbs.	257 ft.-lbs.	274 ft.-lbs.	264 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	2.9 in.	2.25 in.	1.5 in.	2.0 in.	2.25 in.
Average Group	3.4 in.	2.7 in.	2.1 in.	2.5 in.	2.6 in.

Gorilla Ammunition 115-gr. JHP	Bersa BP9MCC	Honor Defense FIST	Ruger EC9s	Smith & Wesson Shield	Taurus G2S
Average Velocity	1070 fps	1029 fps	1045 fps	1065 fps	1049 fps
Muzzle Energy	292 ft.-lbs.	270 ft.-lbs.	278 ft.-lbs.	289 ft.-lbs.	280 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	2.0 in.	2.6 in.	2.0 in.	2.5 in.	2.3 in.
Average Group	2.6 in.	3.0 in.	2.5 in.	3.0 in.	2.7 in.

Black Hills Ammunition 115-gr. EXP	Bersa BP9MCC	Honor Defense FIST	Ruger EC9s	Smith & Wesson Shield	Taurus G2S
Average Velocity	1122 fps	1090 fps	1081 fps	1101 fps	1115 fps
Muzzle Energy	321 ft.-lbs.	303 ft.-lbs.	298 ft.-lbs.	309 ft.-lbs.	317 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	2.8 in.	1.9 in.	1.7 in.	2.2 in.	2.35 in.
Average Group	3.3 in.	2.3 in.	2.3 in.	2.8 in.	2.9 in.

We averaged the results from three five-shot groups for accuracy. The groups were fired at 15 yards. We recorded velocity with a Competition Electronics Chronograph. Range for velocity testing is 10 feet. Temperature at the time of testing ranged from 94 to 103 degrees. All groups were fired with an O.H. Products Bullshooter Pistol Rest at 25 yards (#666-100-013WB, $58 from Brownells.com). Ammo sources: Jesse James Ammo, Inc. 124-grain JHP ($14.24/20 SportsmansGuide.com); Gorilla Ammunition 115-grain JHP ($33.69/20 CheaperThanDirt.com); Black Hills Ammunition 115-grain EXP ($15/20 rounds LuckyGunner.com).

action-first-shot pistols. The BP9MCC is a completely different design from those, however. It is a departure from the 380 pistols or the Thunder full-size handguns. The frame is polymer, and the pistol uses a striker-fired action. The pistol was introduced long before Glock offered its slim-line G43 and offers a slim frame and compact grip. The blued-steel slide holds a 3.3-inch barrel. The rear of the slide has the Glock look with an action cover similar to the Glock, and the ejector and barrel lock up are also similar to the Glock. The rear cocking serrations are angled forward and work well. The slide is beveled and rounded on the top, a distinctive touch compared to the other handguns. In the modern fashion, the recoil guide rod features heavy-recoil-spring technology and a steel recoil rod. During testing, the pistol proved to be a light kicker for its weight, so the recoil-guide assembly works. A trade off is greater effort to rack the slide. The sights are atypical for a small pistol, with dovetailed sights both front and rear. The front post holds a single white dot, while the rear has a small dot on each post. These sights proved to work well in all testing, from firing for absolute accuracy to combat shooting.

The polymer frame offers a good contrast of abrasion and adhesion. The pebble-grain grip frame sides offer a hold for the palm, while wedged cuts in the front strap and rear strap offer good gripping surfaces. The frame narrows at the top to allow for a shorter trigger reach, a feature we appreciated. Just above the forward section of the rounded trigger guard are two pebbled areas, one on each side. They may be used to rest the finger tip as you keep the finger off the trigger before you fire.

The magazine release is ambidextrous. The magazine release is protected by a raised section of the frame. This magazine release is positive in operation and secure. The steel 8-round magazines are well made. The frame features a reasonably-sized rail for mounting a combat light, a good feature that the Smith & Wesson Shield, Honor Defense Honor Guard, and Ruger EC9s do not have. The pistol features a loaded-chamber indicator. This is a small lever that raises when a round is chambered. Both visual and tactile observation tell you when the gun is loaded. There is a key-controlled locking device on the slide. We don't care for these, but some people do. It is a feature for long-term storage. There is also a magazine safety that prevents the BP9MCC from firing if there is no magazine inserted. This is a case of the technical over the tactical, but some folks like the idea of a magazine safety.

Disassembly isn't difficult, but it is old school. The slide is retracted to a point where witness marks on the slide and frame meet, and the slide-lock lever is pressed

out. The pistol was stiff at first, but after a break-down or two, it loosened up.

The trigger system is a unique feature and one that took acclimation even for our most experienced shooters. There are very good shots among the raters, and all agree accuracy potential is there, but only for those who practice. (We also value and use the opinions of less-experienced shooters because newbies make up much of the market for handguns.) The trigger is a short-reset double-action-only style. There is a safety feature similar to the Glock; however, there is no lever set in the face of the trigger. As one rater pointed out, this may make the Bersa more susceptible to lateral discharge, but we weren't able to create that experience. The trigger pivots 0.25 inch on a steel roll pin. This action releases the safety. Once the safety is released, actually breaking the trigger against the sear requires 3.7 pounds of press. The total weight of pull is about 4.2 pounds average. This trigger action feels lighter than the others and offers a clean break. There is no creep or backlash, and reset is fast. The trigger need not return completely to battery. You keep the trigger to the rear and keep firing with a clean break.

To evaluate the 9mm pistols used in this test, our shooters fired the combat course with a handload consisting of a 115-grain plated roundnose bullet over 4.7 grains of W244. The Bersa exhibited 1109 fps with this load, so it is a full-power training load. We also used the Jesse James Ammo's 124-grain JHP, the Gorilla Ammunition 115-grain JHP, and the Black Hills Ammunition 115-grain EXPs. We ran 100 rounds in each pistol on the combat course, and a magazine of each hollow point in firing offhand at 10 yards to test reliability. The three factory loads were used for accuracy testing from a solid bench rest.

For most raters, the pistol offered a full firing grip. For some, the small finger rested on the magazine basepad. The magazines were easy to load from start to finish, a good point for the Bersa. In firing 100 rounds on the firing range at 7, 10, and 15 yards, the pistol never failed to feed, chamber, fire, or eject. The BP9MCC came on target quickly and offered good heft. Recoil was never uncomfortable, though we could tell the handload was hotter than two of the three factory loads tested. Burning a magazine down and then quickly reloading was positive with the generous magazine release and slide lock. The pistol fired about 1 to 1.5 inches high with most loads. The Jesse James loading, at 1001 fps, struck to the point of aim. The Bersa demonstrated the highest velocities of the five pistols tested. Perhaps the polygonal rifling had a bearing on this.

Firing from a solid benchrest position, we expected good accuracy due to the Bersa's good sights and excellent trigger. What we found was the BP9MCC was the least accurate handgun of the test at 15 yards instead of 25 yards, since these are lightweight handguns designed for personal defense. The most accurate load

BERSA BP9MCC 9MM LUGER, $295

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The pistol is reliable, feels good in the hand, and offers excellent practical handling in fast-paced drills. Some of the features, such as the magazine safety and locking action, were extraneous but did not affect performance. We liked the fit and finish. The ramped barrel offers a degree of safety with heavy loads. We would have liked more accuracy, but the pistol is adequate for most chores. The racking effort is greater than on other handguns.



Action	Short-reset double action only
Length	6.35 in.
Height	4.8 in.
Maximum Width	0.94 in.
Weight Unloaded	21.5 oz.
Weight Loaded	24.0 oz.
Barrel	3.3 in., polygonal
Capacity	8+1
Magazines	(2) 8-round
Slide	Matte-black blued steel
Slide Retraction Effort	17.5 lbs.
Frame	Matte-black polymer
Front Strap Height	2.4 in.
Back Strap Height	3.4 in.
Grip Thickness Max.	0.95 in.
Grip Circumference Max	5.0 in.
Sight, Front	SIG type, dovetailed
Sight, Rear	Glock type, dovetailed
Sight Radius	5.6 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	4.2 in.
Trigger Span	2.4 in.
Safeties	Drop, trigger, action lock, magazine
Warranty	1 year; unlimited for original purchaser
Website	Bersa@EagleImports.com
Telephone	(732) 493-0333
Made In	Argentina



A high point of the test was the frame treatment given the Bersa and Honor Guard handguns. They offered good gripping surfaces without abrasion.





Left: A bold front post aided in rapid target acquisition. The front sight is dovetailed in place.



We fired with one hand during much of the combat test. We stressed rapid sight acquisition and recoil control.



This is a well-made handgun. The BP9MCC gets high marks for design and execution. The grip is properly textured for excellent adhesion and abrasion.



There were no tool marks and every piece of the Bersa showed good fit and finish. Viewed from the rear, the pistol has a thin profile — less than an inch wide.



When the pistol was field stripped, we discovered a polygonal-rifled ramped barrel.

in the Bersa was the Gorilla Ammunition 115-grain JHP at 2.6 inches. The Jesse James 124-grain JHP was least accurate at 3.4 inches. While this isn't impressive, it would be adequate for most threat management.

Our Team Said: We prefer a more accurate handgun, and there was one in the test that we liked better. Also, we would have preferred a manual safety or trigger lever.

Honor Defense Honor Guard HG9SCF FIST 9mm Luger, $400

This was a recent price from BudsGunShop.com. Honor Defense is a veteran-owned company that first began manufacturing handguns in 2016. The pistols are single-stack designs chambered in 9mm Luger. There is a long-slide variation that accepts a combat light, but the pistol tested is the most interesting, we feel. This handgun features an extension of the frame that is designed to prevent the pistol from failing to function if the pistol is jammed into an adversary's body and fired. This is a shortcoming of the automatic versus the revolver. The revolver may be used as a belly gun; that is, put in the other guy's belly and fired as needed. So may the automatic, but it might only fire once because it can't go back into battery. The Honor Guard line is filled with features designed purely for personal defense, and the handguns have much merit in this regard. These are striker-fired pistols with a polymer frame. The pistol features a 3.2-inch barrel and no external safeties. An advantage is that most of the components are made from stainless steel, so corrosion is less of an issue than on a blued gun. The slide features cocking serrations that run from the front to the rear. The new Beretta APX uses a similar design to accomplish the same purpose. With cold, sweaty, or bloody hands, the Honor Defense Honor Guard 9mm offers plenty of gripping surface. If you need more leverage to rack the slide, the slide may be racked by jutting the front face of the rear sights against the belt or boot heel. While we have never had to do, so many veterans like this feature. It certainly doesn't hurt anything, and it is better to have it and not need it than the reverse.

The top of the slide features a bright-orange front dot sight and white-outline rear sight. These were the best sights of the test. The pistol features a stainless-steel barrel and stainless striker assembly and housing. The action is modular and may be removed en bloc. This is a good feature for cleaning and maintenance. The frame treatment is unique. The texture is coarse but does not abrade the hand when firing. Adhesion and lack of abrasion are therefore excellent. There is little that is smooth on the frame. The teardrop-shaped magazine release is ambidextrous. The grip is indented to make for a shorter trigger reach. There is a roll pin that allows changing the backstrap, an advantage the other pistols do not have. The two panels are either flat or arched and should accommodate most hand sizes. Since this is a compact frame, most hands will work

HONOR DEFENSE HONOR GUARD HG9SCF FIST 9MM LUGER, $400

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The FIST option (Firearm Integrated Standoff) is viable. We tested it against paper and against barricades with excellent results. The trigger action was heavy and accuracy not at the top.



Action	Double action only
Length	6.6 in.
Height	4.8 in.
Width	1.2 in.
Weight Unloaded	23.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	26.0 oz.
Barrel	3.2 in. long, stainless steel; ferric nitro-carburized finish; 1:10 RH twist
Capacity	8+1
Magazines	(2) 8-round
Slide	Stainless steel; ferric nitro-carburized finish; front & rear serrations
Slide Retraction Effort	13.5 lbs.
Frame	Polymer over stainless-steel modular chassis; two modular backstraps, black polymer grips
Grip Front Strap Height	2.45 in.
Grip Back Strap Height	3.2 in.
Grip Thickness Max.	0.9 in.
Grip Circumference Max	5.3 in.
Sight, Front	Bright-orange dot insert, post
Sight, Rear	Wide-notch rear
Sight Radius	5.3 in.
Safety	No manual safety
Front Sight	Post with orange dot
Rear Sight	White outline
Trigger Pull Weight	7.0 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.6 in.
Safety	None
Warranty	Limited lifetime
Website	HonorDefense.com
Telephone	(678) 943-8035
Made In	U.S.A.



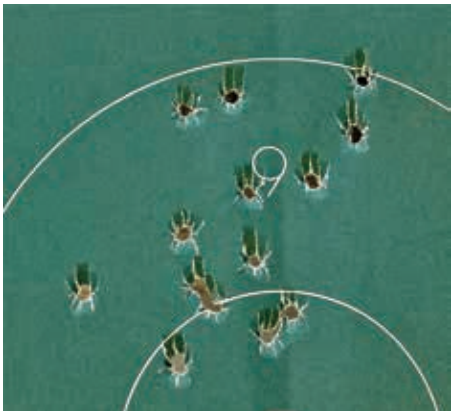
The FIST frame device is unique and well suited to personal combat in close quarters. The lip on the slide keeps the action from being disengaged if in contact with an assailant. One rater described the pistol as having an armored look. It is certainly unique. We liked the all-round cocking serrations.











Above: In dim light, the bright-orange-dot front sight of the Honor Guard performed well. Right: We liked the bold front post. The sight picture is one of the main advantages of the pistol. Far right: The Honor Guard gave good grouping on the combat course.



The Honor Guard's magazine appears left, then the Bersa's magazine, middle, and the Taurus magazine. All were well made and performed as we expected.



Disassembling the Honor Guard isn't difficult.

RUGER EC9S 3283 9MM LUGER, $231

GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

The EC9s was the most accurate handgun of the test, which says a lot for the handgun despite its light weight. We question saving forty dollars and giving up superior sights, but some of us are on a tight budget. We like the manual safety. We feel that some shooters will be discouraged from cleaning the piece because the takedown isn't as simple as other handguns.



Action	Double action only; striker fired
Overall Length	6.0 in.
Overall Height	4.5 in.
Maximum Width	1.05 in.
Weight Unloaded	17.1 oz.
Weight Loaded	19.6 oz.
Capacity	7+1
Magazine	(1) 7-round; finger-grip, extension floorplate
Barrel	3.12 in. long, alloy steel; 1:10 RH twist; 6 grooves; chamber-inspection port, black-oxide finish
Slide	Alloy steel; black-oxide finish
Slide Retraction Effort	13.0 lbs.
Frame	Black glass-filled Nylon; checkered side panels
Frame Front Strap Height	2.3 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	2.7 in.
Grip Thickness (max)	0.97 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	5.0 in.
Sight, Front	Integral, rear serrations
Sight, Rear	Integral, rear serrations
Sight Radius	4.7 in.
Trigger Pull Weight (Double Action)	6.2 lbs.
Trigger Span (Double Action)	3.3 in.
Safeties	Integrated trigger tab; frame-mounted lever; magazine disconnect
Warranty	None written
Telephone	(888) 220-1173
Website	Ruger.com
Made In	U.S.A.
CA Approved	No
MA Approved & Certified	No

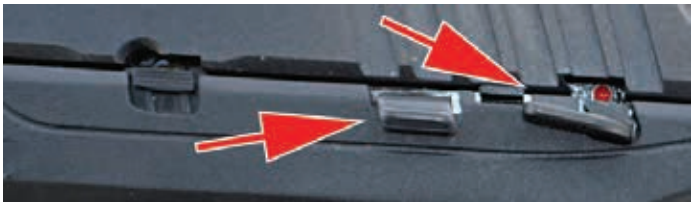




Above: The slide serrations helped run the gun. Slide retraction effort was a middling 13 pounds. Right: The grip is a shade thin for most hands. Running at high speed to slide lock back, the pistol sometimes squirmed in the shooter's hand.



We did not like the Ruger's disassembly procedure. We think that removing the takedown pin is cumbersome. Reassembly is more difficult than it should be.



We like the manual safety. The slide lock, left, may protrude too much.



The Ruger was the most accurate when firing off the benchrest, but not when performing combat drills.



The EC9s is both reliable and inexpensive. The pistol is a good buy, but not the best buy of the test.



The Ruger 9mm was supplied with only one magazine. All the others came with two, which we think is the minimum a shooter should expect — one in the gun and one back up. More is better, of course.

well with either insert, but fine-tuning the grip doesn't hurt. The backstrap covers the magazine. This is a better feel than the hand contacting the magazine on firing. There is no provision for a light.

Take down is simple. There is a lever that is rotated on the frame to disassemble the pistol. This system is SIG- or Beretta-like in simplicity, and we preferred it over the Ruger, Taurus, and Bersa systems, and equal to the Smith & Wesson build. The Honor Guard features a slide lock that isn't difficult to use. Honor Defense states that the slide lock isn't a slide release. To run the pistol in combat shooting, the drill is to replace the magazine and use the slingshot method to release the slide by grasping the slide at the rear and letting it run forward. Some of the raters could release the slide by using the slide lock; some could not. A previous crew testing a different Honor Defense 9mm found this a demerit. We did not. Considering how many small pistols have a problem with the shooter allowing his or her thumb to run into the slide lock and lock the slide back during a firing string, the Honor Guard design is valid. The slide is easily grasped by the generous cocking serrations and released to load the pistol.

The trigger action is heavier than we like at 7.0 pounds, but it breaks cleanly enough with a sharp reset.

In its literature, Honor Defense recommends a 150-round break-in period for its pistol. We respect this recommendation, but we also expect modern pistols to come out of the box running. This is our third Honor Guard pistol, and all came out of the box ready to fight.

The FIST pistol was tested with the same loads as the other handguns and combat firing was conducted first. We stressed speed loads and firing quickly at center mass on intruder-sized targets. The Honor Guard is easily the most comfortable handgun to fire and use, our shooters said. We center-punched the target on demand with the Honor Guard and found the orange-dot front sight stayed on the

SMITH & WESSON M&P9 SHIELD BATTLEWORN COATING
SW180021BW 9MM LUGER, $400
GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Shield is reliable, accurate enough for most uses, and compact enough for everyday carry. We also handled a used version of this Shield that was only $250. We'd strongly recommend the used version as a Best Buy.



Action	Double action only, striker fired
Length	6.1 in.
Height	4.6 to 5.0 in.
Maximum Width	0.9 in.
Weight Unloaded	21.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	24.0 oz.
Barrel	3.1 in.
Capacity	6+1 Standard
Magazines	(1) 6- and (1) 7-round
Slide	Steel, Battleworn coating
Racking Effort	12.0 lbs.
Grip Thickness Max.	0.9 in.
Grip Circumference Max	5.25 in.
Slide	Steel
Racking Effort	12.0 lbs.
Frame	Polymer, embedded stainless-steel chassis
Grip Material	Polymer
Frame Front Strap Height	1.8 in.
Frame Rear Strap Height	2.8 in.
Grip Thickness Max.	0.9 in.
Grip Circumference	5.25 in.
Sight, Front	White outline post
Sight, Rear	White outline
Sight Radius	5.9 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	5.4 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.6 in.
Safety	Frame-mounted lever
Warranty	1 year
Website	Smith-Wesson.com
Telephone	(800) 331-0852
Made In	U.S.A.

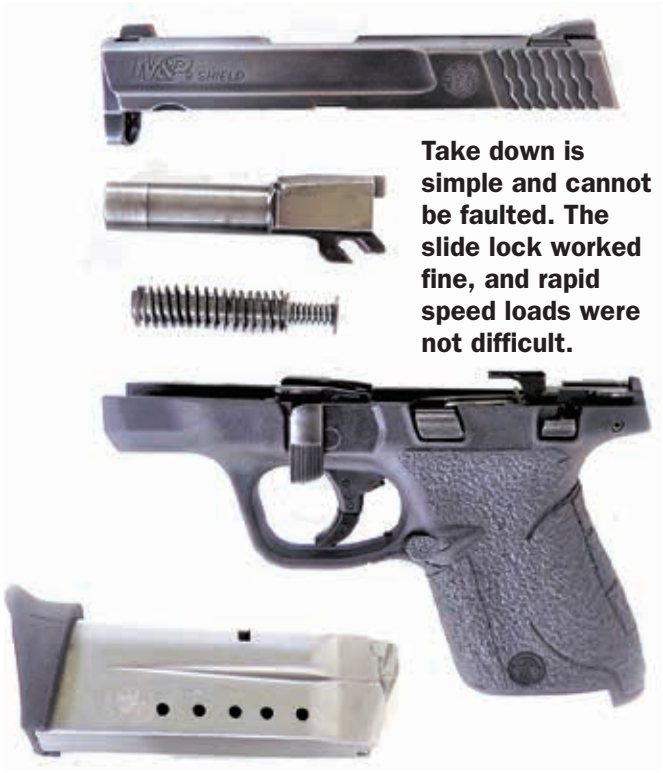


Running the gun to slide-lock open in combat drills, the Shield provided good performance, allowing us to shoot reasonable groups at top speed.



The pistol slide was finished in the Battleworn style. It doesn't quite look like it walked off a battlefield, but it does "age" the handgun. We liked it. Getting a similar finish on an out-of-the-box Shield would require, at least, several hundred rounds and a lot of holster wear. The average price for such a treatment is about a hundred dollars.





Take down is simple and cannot be faulted. The slide lock worked fine, and rapid speed loads were not difficult.



Fired offhand, the Shield proved controllable and accurate. The sights are good, but not as good as the Honor Guard's. The grip is small enough to access the controls without shifting the grip.





We used both six- and seven-round magazines and prefer the finger extension of the seven-round magazine, as shown. We have previously praised the texture of the grip.

target well. Running the pistol empty, doing a speed load, and then grasping the rear of the slide to release the slide and make the pistol ready proved faster and more secure than the usual tilting of the hand to one side to engage the slide lock. Only the Bersa BP9MCC, with its generous slide lock, approached the ability of the Honor Guard FIST for speedy loading.

When firing the FIST pistol, we found it difficult to create a viable means of testing the FIST offset piece on the frame, but it definitely has merit. In fact, we found an advantage that Honor Defense has not advertised. When firing from a barricade, the shooter must be careful not to jam the pistol into the barricade and push it out of battery. This wasn't possible with the Honor Defense Honor Guard FIST. You could push the lower frame against a barricade and fire without danger of the pistol being rammed out of battery. If we were going to purchase an Honor Defense handgun, this would be the first choice, especially because there is no surcharge for the FIST option.

Likewise, the pistol is easily the most comfortable to fire of the five 9mm handguns. The Honor Guard 9mm is designed for use with +P and +P+ loads, and it is strong enough to take these loads, according to the company. While the Honor Guard is slightly larger than the other pistols, when the measurements are compiled, it is only by a few tenths of an inch here and there, and none of the handguns are pocket pistols per se. This is a gun for shooters, as one of the raters noted, even though it isn't the most accurate handgun we tested. Fired from the benchrest, the heavy trigger weighed against us. This pistol is accurate enough for personal defense but is not a tack driver by any means. The best group at 15 yards, with the Black Hills 115-grain EXP, was 2.3 inches, with the others larger. Even with a 3-inch group, this means that each bullet should land within 1.5 inches of the point of aim.

There is no option for mounting a combat light, so we gave it a half-point demerit. Also, we recognize it would be difficult to design the pistol to accept a combat light and utilize the FIST option, but then, we are hard to please, in support of our readers.

Our Team Said: The Honor Guard doesn't place the technical over the tactical. The large cocking serrations, good sights, excellent frame treatment, and complete reliability make it a good choice for personal defense. The FIST option is so unusual there really isn't anything to compare it against.

Our police and military raters felt the FIST offset was more important than a light-bearing option for civilian personal defense. This is the pistol that we recommend for personal defense among the five tested, although it is also the most expensive.

Ruger EC9s 3283 9mm Luger, $231

At BudsGunShop.com at the time of this writing, the Ruger LC9s was for sale at $274, and the EC9s, the economy model, was selling for $43 less. The EC9s is intended to offer shooters a quality handgun at a reduced

TAURUS G2S 1-G2S931 9MM LUGER, $204

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

The Taurus pistol was completely reliable and controllable in rapid fire at the combat range. We believe the six-section stippled grip surface with smooth sections in between was among the pistol's best design features. The combination of a safety lever set into the trigger face and a positive manual safety was attractive. The sights are adequate, and the rear sight is adjustable. The trigger action proved light and controllable. The finish isn't very rugged and will suffer in long-term use, but then this is an inexpensive pistol. We did not like the takedown as much as some of the other pistols, but Glock owners will be familiar with the set up.



Action	Double action only
Length	6.3 in.
Height	5.1 in.
Maximum Width	1.2 in.
Weight Unloaded	21.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	23.0 oz.
Barrel	3.2 in.
Capacity	7+1
Magazines	(2) 7-round
Slide	Matte-black steel
Slide Racking Effort	12.0 lbs.
Frame	Polymer; accessory rail
Grip Front Strap Height	2.0 in.
Grip Back Strap Height	3.0 in.
Grip Thickness Max	0.95 in.
Grip Circumference Max	5.25 in.
Grip Material	Polymer
Sight, Front	White dot post
Sight, Rear	Adjustable white outline
Sight Radius	5.6 in.
Trigger Pull	4.6 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.5 lbs.
Safeties	Lever, trigger tab, striker block
Warranty	Limited Lifetime
Website	TaurusUSA.com
Telephone	(304) 624-1115
Made In	Brazil









Despite its light weight, the Taurus was comfortable to fire off hand. None of the pistols are hard kickers. We could not fault the performance of the loads tested, all were reliable and provided decent accuracy.



Here's the pistol disassembled into its main components. There were no tool marks that we noticed, and the pistol showed good workmanship internally.



The Taurus proved to be reliable with the most powerful load tested, the Black Hills Ammunition 115-grain EXP. For the self-defense shooter, this round has some pop.





The Taurus G2S is a slim and lightweight handgun. Though it's inexpensive, the G2S has good features, such as, above, its slide is beveled at the muzzle to aid in holstering. Right, we liked the positive manual safety of the G2S. We found the safety positive in operation. The location on the frame allows for rapid manipulation. None of the controls are ambidextrous, so this handgun is bested suited to the right-handed carrier.

price. When the pistol is based on a proven and reliable handgun, then we may accept the economy version if it is a good performer. The pistol is striker fired and uses a seven-shot magazine, but only one was supplied. The EC9s isn't the smallest pistol tested nor the largest. The EC9s has eliminated the original LC9s dovetailed sights and supplied sights that are integral with the slide. This eliminates a number of machine operations and cuts costs. The new sights are lower than those on the LC9s, and the rear sight features a serrated rear face. The rear notch is wide and the front post small, but they are capable of good accuracy when properly aligned. If you are going to cut costs and eliminate a dovetailed sight, then integral sights are much better than staked-on sights that may fly off in hard use.

The slide appears to be identical to the LC9s in other regards, including the ejection port, extractor, and grasping grooves. The grip frame is thin and short with adequate stippling, if not up to the level of the Bersa 9mm mentioned previously. The magazine release and slide lock are adequate. The overall level of fit and finish are good. We did not like that the pistol was delivered with a single magazine, as the equally inexpensive Taurus was delivered with two. There is no accommodation for mounting a combat light. The Taurus G2S will mount a combat light. The trigger action is the same as the LC9s. This trigger features a lever insert into the face that prevents lateral discharge. The trigger action features a slight take up before breaking at 6.2 pounds in our example. This Ruger is lighter than a LC9s tested previously. The EC9s features a manual safety. The safety may be used or ignored, but it offers the shooter more options. The Taurus G2S and Smith & Wesson Shield also featured a manual safety; the Honor Defense Honor Guard and Bersa BP9MCC did not.

We did not like the Ruger's disassembly procedure. We think that removing the takedown pin is cumbersome. A tool is placed under







The Shield (above) gave credible results and has a big-name warranty. The Battleworn finish makes the pistol look used out of the box. Some readers will question whether wear should be earned with time on the range. Middle is the Taurus, which was a middle-of-the-road performer with the test loads we used. Right: We used a good supply of handloads during the evaluation. All pistols fed this recipe well.

the tip of the takedown pin and then the slide retracted and removed forward from the frame. Reassembly is more difficult than it should be with a modern handgun, in the opinion of our rating team.

On the firing line, the EC9s was fired with the same ammunition as the other handguns. During the initial firing tests, we fired at intruder-sized targets at 7, 10, and 15 yards. During this section, one of the raters let his support-hand thumb run into the slide lock. We did not count this as a malfunction because it was shooter induced. However, the Ruger EC9s squirmed in the hand more than the other handguns. Molded-in checkering and a thin grip did not work well for us. Shooting in rapid fire, the pistol demanded adjustment by some raters by the fifth shot. The pistol was the least capable in combat drills, but it performed reasonably well. Fired from a braced benchrest firing position, the Ruger provided excellent results. It was the most accurate handgun tested. All loads shot in the 2-inch range at 15 yards, and the Jesse James trademarked load broke at 1.5 inches. The Ruger is an accurate little piece.

Our Team Said: As we compared notes, the Ruger EC9s was our least favorite based on combat range performance, which we feel was hurt by the grip-frame design and a slide-heavy feel. But the pistol was the most accurate tested from the bench. It isn't supplied with a spare magazine, which all the others had in the box, and it doesn't accommodate a light. We also rated it down for its difficult disassembly.

S&W M&P9 Shield Battleworn Coating SW180021BW 9mm Luger, $400

We have tested the Shield 9mm pistol as far back as 2008. While it has been done before, we feel that the previously **A**-rated Shield should be matched up against the new Taurus GS2 in particular. We found a fresh Shield to add breadth to the testing. The frame has been treated to the familiar polymer frame rework and refitting, and it came off well. We don't know who did the work, but it was well turned out. The difference in frame circumference in this pistol and the original Shield is only .01 inch.

The pistol was a particularly good buy as the slide is finished in the Battleworn finish. It doesn't quite look like it walked off a battlefield, but it is noticeable, and we liked it nonetheless. For the everyday shooter, getting this finish would require several hundred (maybe thousands) of rounds and a lot of holster in and out. The Shield features good design elements, including a well-shaped grip, good sights, and a good trigger. We like the manual safety. Compared to the other handguns, we really like the grip treatment. While it can be done at home, the average price for such a treatment is one hundred dollars.

If you have no problem with the Shield as issued, it isn't worthwhile. The sights are good, but not as good as the Honor Guard pistol's. We like the manual safety. Some of the raters feel a self-loading pistol should have a manual safety, and the Shield safety isn't difficult to manipulate.

Take down is simple. The slide lock worked fine, and rapid speed loads were not difficult. We used both six- and seven-round magazines and prefer the finger extension of the seven-round magazine. The grip is small enough to access the controls without shifting the firing grip.

Our Team Said: The trigger action of this pistol is nearly a pound lighter than previously tested 9mm Shield handguns. We do not know if the trigger has been modified or adjusted, but performance in the hand was good. Performance on paper was in the middle of the road at 2.0 to 3.0 inches in average accuracy. Our Team Said: The Shield performed well and earned an A grade with reliable function, good handling, and great looks.

Taurus G2S 1-G2S931 9mm Luger, $204

This is the least expensive handgun tested. Yet the



Compared to a snubnose 38 Special, the slim-line 9mm has greater magazine capacity and is flatter in profile. This is the Ruger EC9s.

Taurus 9mm is supplied with two magazines. This handgun is a slim line version of the previous Millennium G2, which uses a 12-round magazine. The new G2S features a seven-round magazine. The G2S is noticeably thinner than the original G2 in the grip. The pistol has a pleasing appearance. However, after the testing was complete, we noticed the G2S had developed wear marks on the matte finish. The beveling of the slide both rear and forward gives the appearance of an even smaller handgun. The sights are the same as the G2 with three-dot white outlines. The rear sight is adjustable for windage, an advantage over the other handguns. The pistol features steel rails inside the frame for the slide to ride on. This is traditional for polymer-frame handguns. The pistol features a loaded-chamber indicator similar to the Bersa BP9MCC.

The Taurus also features a manual safety. We found the safety positive in operation. The location on the frame allows for rapid manipulation. The slide lock worked well in administrative handling and for facilitating speed loads. The magazine release is positive in operation as well. None of the controls are ambidextrous, so this handgun is bested suited for the right-handed carrier. The G2S also features a safety lever set into the face of the trigger.

The frame features good stippling that aids in control. It is set in six different areas on the grip and front and rear strap. The frame rail is only an inch long, so a compact combat light is needed. The frame allows for a good firing grip for most hands. Larger hand sizes will find the small finger lapping under. This pistol does not feature the internal locking mechanism of more expensive Taurus pistols. We do not miss it.

During initial firing, we found the trigger break to be quite short and light. The pistol feels like a true single action, and we recommend the pistol always be carried with the safety engaged. We rated the Taurus trigger as a high point of the pistol's design. At 4.6 pounds, the trigger is both light and crisp. If you experience a dud round, the Taurus offers a restrike option. Press the trigger again and you have a trigger action that was not set by the slide, so it is heavier at 6.0 pounds. In our experience, cartridges that fail to fire are seldom set off by a second try, but the Taurus second strike feature hurts nothing and is good to have. The manual of arms is simple enough — load, place the safety on, draw, safety off, fire.

On the firing range the Taurus proved to be reliable, firing 100 rounds of FMJ loads and 21 JHP loads without any malfunctions. The Taurus is light but not quite as light as the EC9s. Recoil was rated less than the Ruger 9mm, but pushback was more noticeable with the Taurus than with the other pistols. However, the Taurus did not squirm in the hand and remained controllable during the combat firing stage. We really liked the trigger action. This made the pistol's combat firing scores good to excellent despite its light weight.

Firing from a solid benchrest position, the Taurus gave credible and very consistent groups. A 2-inch group with Gorilla Ammunition was good performer in such a light handgun. The Taurus was not as accurate as the Ruger EC9s, but it was more accurate than the other handguns. Considering its low price, the Taurus gave excellent performance, and price aside, the pistol was as desirable a combat gun as the Shield, we felt. The Bersa's light trigger was appealing, but we prefer the Taurus pistol's safety features. We did not particularly like the Glock-like takedown of the Taurus. We preferred the Honor Guard 9mm's simple takedown lever. The Taurus was not hard to manage, it simply isn't our favorite takedown sequence.

Our Team Said: The Taurus is a good pistol for personal defense and earned the Best Buy rating in the test.

Summing up, we would buy any of these handguns. However, some have superior features that individuals may prefer. Notably, there were no malfunctions of any type during the test related to the feed cycle and only one of any type, a tie up when a shooter put his finger on the slide lock of the Ruger EC9s. Accuracy wasn't the best we have tested, but it is good for light pistols. The Shield, a previous Best Buy in different dress, was bumped by the performance from the Taurus G2S. Regarding the Bersa, some of the raters were skittish about carrying a handgun with such a light trigger, even in a well-designed holster. With the Honor Guard, there is no chance of inadvertently locking the slide back when firing, and the handgun had many other combat features. For the person willing to train with an individual handgun, any would serve as a comfortable EDC choice. But as for what we would buy, our shooters kept coming back to the Taurus G2S and its good features for a small price.

Written and photographed by Gun Tests Staff, using evaluations from Gun Tests team testers. **GT**

Cowboy Up with Lever Guns From Cimarron, Uberti, Taylor's

Life is too short to shoot an ugly rifle, so we tested three beauties with this timeless action. If forced to choose, we would fill our dance card with Taylor's & Company 1873 Comanchero.

Good, modern-day cowboy-action shooters can push lead out of lever-action rifles at about 10 shots in two seconds. That's fast. Tuned guns help. SASS (Single Action Shooting Society) rules allow only original or replica centerfire lever- or slide-action rifles that reflect the period between 1860 and 1899. Caliber can be the minimum, 32, to the largest, 45. Rifles must have exposed hammers, tubular magazines, and barrel lengths longer than 16 inches to qualify for matches. That means clones of the Winchester Model 1866, Models 1873, and Model 1892, are contenders, as well as the Marlin 1894 and reproductions of the Colt Lightning. Many competitors run reloaded 38 Special to the minimum velocity. SASS rules require rifle ammunition to have a maximum muzzle velocity of 1,400 fps or less. The 38 Special has other attributes that make it popular, such as mild recoil, less cost, and ease of reloading.



These lever rifles were fun to shoot and were well suited for cowboy action shooting and plinking. Top to bottom are the Uberti 1873 Competition, Taylor's & Company 1873 Comanchero, and Cimarron 1866 Yellow Boy Short Rifle. All are carbines with octagonal barrels.





Above: The stock on the Cimarron 1866 (top) has a different angle compared to the Uberti 1873 rifle (bottom). They handle differently. Right: Here, all three rifles are stacked to show the difference in the short-stroke models from Taylor's and Uberti compared to a standard-stroke model on top, the Cimarron.

For this test, we acquired three rifles that fire the 38 Special cartridge:

- *Cimarron Model 1866 Yellow Boy Short Rifle;*
- *Taylor's & Co. Model 1873 Comanchero*, and;
- *Uberti Model 1873 Competition.*

The Taylor's and Uberti are also chambered in 357 Magnum, so they could be used for hunting small- to medium-size game. The Taylor's and Uberti also have factory action jobs on them to enhance their performance in competition; specifically, they both have short-stroke levers that allow the user to manipulate the lever faster than the standard Model 1873. We choose the Cimarron 1866 to see if the factory-tuned option made the rifle easier to use. In our opinion, it does. The lever-locking latch, which holds the lever in place, seems unneeded with these rifles since they are so new, but with use, the lever will loosen and have some play.

Both the 1866 and 1873 models use a toggle link mechanism that is operated by the shooter via the lever. To load, cartridges are pushed through the loading gate and into a magazine tube that keeps the cartridges under spring tension in the carrier block. When the lever is pushed forward to eject an empty case, the carrier block is raised up with a fresh cartridge. At the same time the firing-pin extension cocks back the hammer. When the lever is moved back, the fresh round is chambered, the carrier returns down, and the magazine-tube follower pushes the next fresh cartridge into the carrier. On short-stroke rifles such as the Uberti and Taylor's, the arc of the lever is shortened, so, in theory and practice, the shorter the stroke, the faster the rifle can be fired.

While the 1873 is perhaps the most popular rifle model used in competition, the '66 also has a following. There are substantial differences in the designs between the 1873 and 1866 models. They use different receivers, and the 1866 lacks a safety device that requires the user to bring the lever fully rearward to fire the rifle. In operation, the 1866 and 1873 are identical. Another difference in

RANGE DATA

American Eagle 38 Special 158-gr. LRN	Taylor's & Company 1873 Comanchero Rifle	Uberti 1873 Competition	Cimarron 1866 Yellow Boy Short Rifle
Average Velocity	1009 fps	974 fps	1013 fps
Muzzle Energy	357 ft.-lbs.	333 ft.-lbs.	360 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.52 in.	1.72 in.	1.92 in.
Average Group	1.77 in.	1.92 in.	1.97 in.

Armscor 38 Special 158-gr. FMJ	Taylor's & Company 1873 Comanchero Rifle	Uberti 1873 Competition	Cimarron 1866 Yellow Boy Short Rifle
Average Velocity	993 fps	911 fps	979 fps
Muzzle Energy	346 ft.-lbs.	291 ft.-lbs.	336 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.72 in.	1.80 in.	0.92 in.
Average Group	1.92 in.	2.31 in.	1.32 in.

PMC 38 Special 158-gr. LRN	Taylor's & Company 1873 Comanchero Rifle	Uberti 1873 Competition	Cimarron 1866 Yellow Boy Short Rifle
Average Velocity	1054 fps	939 fps	1056 fps
Muzzle Energy	390 ft.-lbs.	309 ft.-lbs.	391 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.56 in.	1.77 in.	1.82 in.
Average Group	1.78 in.	1.93 in.	1.97 in.

Blazer Brass 357 Magnum 158-gr. JHP	Taylor's & Company 1873 Comanchero Rifle	Uberti 1873 Competition
Average Velocity	1137 fps	973 fps
Muzzle Energy	454 ft.-lbs.	332 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.92 in.	0.92 in.
Average Group	1.97 in.	1.02 in.

To collect accuracy data, we fired five-shot groups from a bench using a rest. Distance: 50 yards with open sights. We recorded velocities using a ProChrono digital chronograph set 10 feet from the muzzle.

the models are their stock drops. The 1873 has less drop than the 1866. Another obvious difference is the 1866 lacks a dust cover. The Model 1873 rifles corrected this because the open actions on the '66 and Henry rifles allowed dust and dirt to accumulate in the action. Dust covers on 1873 models cleans this up. We suggest you try each before you buy to understand what model rifle is better suited to your stature and shooting style.

All three models tested here have 10-round magazines and octagonal 20-inch barrels. The heavier octagonal barrel gives the rifles heft and helps reduce recoil when shooting fast so the competitor stays on target better. We agree the heavier barrels are an asset when levering and shooting these rifles fast. At nearly 8 pounds unloaded, these rifles are heavy yet feel lively in hand for fast, deliberate point shooting.

We wanted to see if factory-tuned rifles were worth the extra cost and if these made-for-fast-shooting replicas were just that — fast shooters. We also looked for ease of use and comfort since shooting 60 rifle rounds is the average rifle round count during a match. Manipulating a lever fast can be rough on hands. The easier the lever is to operate, the faster the follow-up shot and the easier it is to stay on target. Ease of loading is another factor. The Uberti was a breeze to load. We busted our thumbs on the Cimarron. Though these rifles are sold under different names, they were all manufactured by Uberti for Taylor's and Cimarron.

How We Tested

We sourced 38 Special ammo from American Eagle with 158-grain LRN bullets, Armscor with a 158-grain FMJ, PMC with a 158-grain LRN, and Blazer Brass loaded with a 158-grain JHP.

We tested for accuracy using a rest at targets set at 50 yards. Though the maximum distance for cowboy action shooting is 25 yards — except for certain side matches — minimum distance to targets is 13 yards in a match. Also, the minimum rifle-size target is 16 by 16 inches. We also tested for speed at 15 yards using Caldwell Orange Peel targets with a 5.5-inch bullseye. From a low-ready position, we fired five rounds as fast as possible while trying to keep hits on the target. We tested standing and sitting. Note that these are top-ejecting rifles and the force with which you manipulate the lever decides whether the empty case ends up bouncing off your head or over your shoulder. Lesson: Don't baby the levers on these rifles. When the smoke at the range had cleared, this is what we discovered:

Cimarron 1866 Yellow Boy Short Rifle Model CA221 38 Special, $1012

The 1866 Yellow Boy Short Rifle is a replica of the Winchester Model 1866 rifle, called the "Yellow Boy" due to the brass receiver. It was also the first Winchester rifle. The Cimarron is an excellent facsimile, with deep blued barrel, case-hardened lever and hammer, bright brass receiver and smooth walnut stock and forend. This rifle looked great straight out of the plain cardboard box. Fit and finish were excellent. The wood was oiled and smooth. The buttplate was crescent shaped like on original rifles. The end cap on the forend was also brass.

The rear semi-buckhorn sight is adjustable for elevation via a stepped ladder, and windage is adjustable via a brass punch and hammer. The front sight was a plain black blade on a base that was dovetailed into the barrel and held in place with a set screw. If you wanted, you could easily replace the front sight with a white-bead or brass-bead blade, which we would do.

In hand, the Cimarron is lively and comes to the shoulder with ease. The stock drops at a steeper angle than the Model '73 rifles. Testers were split on which stock was better. In our opinion, it is a personal preference based on your neck length and where the gun sits vertically on the shoulder.

Where we noticed a difference in the Cimarron compared to the Uberti and Taylor's was in the action. The Yellow Boy's action was stiff like a new pair of blue jeans. Eventually they break in, but it takes time. We worked the lever vigorously prior to heading to the range to smooth out any burrs. At the range, we found loading the last two cartridges was difficult. We busted our thumbs topping off the Yellow Boy. We also experienced the lever working very stiffly the first time. In fact we had to gorilla the lever to chamber a round. We worked the lever as if we were confronting a bad actor in a B-movie action flick. We got the lever to work, and it became easier to manipulate with use. In the beginning, it seemed when the magazine tube was fully topped off, we had to work the lever more vigorously to ensure we did not short-stroke the rifle. Short-stroking means when the shooter manipulates a firearm and fails to chamber a round, with the subsequent failure to fire. Do not get this confused with the short-stroke levers on the Uberti and Taylor's. By the fifth magazine tube on the '66, we began to break in the Yellow Boy and found manipulating the lever was easier, but we still had to pay attention to push the lever fully forward to clear the chamber, load a fresh round, and get off the shot. After a lot of use, our testers said the Yellow Boy's action became slicker than the Uberti action but not as slick as the Taylor's mechanism.

Because the Yellow Boy uses a brass frame, 357 Magnum ammunition cannot be used in the rifle. If you fancy chasing whitetails or wild pigs, the 357 Magnum makes a better hunting round. This isn't a deal killer, just a reflection of rifle design. We did notice the muzzle velocity of the Cimarron was higher than the Uberti and similar to the Taylor's. With Armscor 158-grain FMJ ammo, we shot a best five-shot group that measured 0.92 inches. Pretty impressive at 50 yards and with open sights. The trigger was a bit heavy, so we were surprised at the results when we tabulated the data. Though the crescent-shape buttplate was slick, it helped center your shoulder on the butt. For speed shooting, the stiff action and trigger did not allow us to perform as well as with the other rifles. There was no take-up

CIMARRON 1866 YELLOW BOY SHORT RIFLE MODEL CA221 38 SP., $1012

GUN TESTS GRADE: B+

The Yellow Boy Short Rifle is a beautiful long arm that is suited for competition and nostalgic plinking. The sights and trigger were serviceable. The action and loading were stiff, but they break in with use.



Action Type	Lever
Overall Length	39.5 in.
Height	7.7 in.
Width	1.3 in.
Weight Unboxed/Unloaded	7.5 lbs.
Weight As Tested/Loaded	9.3 lbs.
Barrel Length/Twist	20 in.; 1:18.5 RH
Barrel Finish	Blued
Receiver Finish/Material	Brass
Buttstock/Forend	Oiled satin-finish walnut, smooth
Stock Buttpad	Brass, crescent shape
Stock LOP	13 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	6.6 lbs.
Trigger Style	Single stage
Safety	None
Magazine	10-round tube
Sights, Rear	Adjustable buckhorn
Sights, Front	Dovetailed gold bead
Warranty	5 year
Telephone	(877) 749-4861
Website	Cimarron-Firearms.com
Made In	Italy



The '66 features a bright brass receiver that is beautiful, but it cannot handle the pressure of 357 Magnum ammo.





With the lever fully forward, the Cimarron's carrier block, right, is raised so the cartridge can be chambered when the lever is moved back. Right: This is the Cimarron's carrier block viewed from the top of the brass receiver.



The Cimarron 1866 lacks a dust cover. The open action can be a magnet for dirt and debris.







The blade front sight was plain. Center, here's a group from the 1866 at 50 yards with Armscor 158-grain FMJs. Right: Here's a group at 50 yards from the 1866 with PMC 158-grain lead roundnose bullets.







Left: The crescent-shaped buttplate on the Cimarron helped position the butt in your shoulder, but it also transferred recoil to your shoulder. Recoil from the 38 Special ammo was not severe, however. Center: The 1866 used a brass forend cap. It was fitted nicely to the wood. The 1866 Yellow Boy required some breaking in. We could tell the working difference between the factory-tuned rifles and a standard rifle at the range.

with the trigger, and it broke at a heavy 6.6 pounds. Our five-shot speed groups averaged between 6.5 and 7 inches. Still plenty good for cowboy competition, but not good enough for us.

Our Team Said: The Cimarron was capable, and we liked it, but be aware that it will need to be broken it. An action job would most likely cost about $200, which would bring the price of the Yellow Boy more in line with the other rifles tested. If you want a period plinker, we think the Cimarron is right on. If you want to up your cowboy-action shooting skills, we'd definitely opt for an action job.

Taylor's & Company 1873 Comanchero Rifle Model 2043COM 357 Magnum, $1496

Taylor's 1873 Comanchero does an excellent job at creating a competition-ready rifle that performs while looking like a rifle from the late 19th century. The Taylor's Comanchero has a pistol-grip stock, so the loop is slightly curved to match the stock. Some testers felt the curved grip was not as comfortable to lever, but due to the slickness of the Comanchero's action, there was less force against your knuckles. The Taylor's had excellent wood-to-metal

fit. The receiver, lever, and hammer were a rich case-hardened blue, while the barrel and magazine tube were deeply blued. The walnut stock had an oil finish and was checkered at the pistol grip and the forend. We appreciated the checkered forend in particular, because on the days we tested it, the weather was humid and our hands were sweaty. We would add brass tacks to the forend of the Uberti and Cimarron for better gripping traction and to remind us where to grasp the rifle for a more consistent grip. We did note that a tiny bit of checkering did chip off during testing. Some of that will happen with vigorous use, but dabbing a brown permanent marker on the spot will reduce its visibility.

The crescent buttplate was covered in a soft piece of buckskin leather stitched together that offers a soft cheek weld and also helped absorb some of the felt recoil, especially with the magnum loads. The lever was also outfitted with a piece of leather stitched onto the bottom part of the loop. The lever on the loop helped make the lever easier to use for some testers, but we felt the straight-lever loops were more comfortable.

Like the Uberti, the Taylor's featured a short-stroke lever that allowed the user to more quickly cycle the rifle. The action on the Comanchero was the slickest of the three rifles tested. It also had the best trigger, and it used a lighter safety system spring, so there was no short-stroking. Not one tester short-stroked the Comanchero, while the other two rifles did see a few short strokes and missed shots.

The rear semi-buckhorn sight is adjustable for windage and elevation, and the front-sight blade had a brass bead. We felt the sights on the Uberti and Taylor's were superior to the sights on the Cimarron.

In accuracy testing, we clustered holes at 50 yards. The data showed the Comanchero was the most accurate of the rifles tested. Our best five-shot group was fired with American Eagle 158-grain LRN bullets. That's larger than the best groups fired from the other rifles, but in the aggregate, the Taylor's pulled ahead. There was some take-up with the trigger, but it broke at a crisp 2.4 pounds.

In the fast-shooting stage of testing, the Comanchero shined. At 15 yards, our best five-shot group measured 3.15 inches, which was the tightest of all the fast-fire groups. The combination of the sights, slick action, and crisp trigger contributed to this positive outcome. We found we could shoot the Comanchero better and faster than the other rifles.

Our Team Said: The Comanchero was the most expensive, but it delivered the performance and features you would want in a competition-ready rifle. The action was slick, the trigger was crisp, and the sights were excellent. Plus, it looked like a period-piece, even though it was tricked out for modern-day cowboy-action shooting.

TAYLOR'S & COMPANY 1873 COMANCHERO RIFLE MODEL 2043COM 357 MAGNUM, $1496

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Comanchero looks period correct yet offers a faster lever than the standard Model '73, plus it was fast when we pushed it and accurate when we were taking our time.



Action Type	Lever
Overall Length	38.8 in.
Height Unboxed	7.7 in.
Width	1.3 in.
Weight Unboxed/Unloaded	7.5 lbs.
Weight As Tested/Loaded	9.3 lbs.
Barrel Length/Twist	20 in.; 1:18.5 RH
Barrel Finish	Blued
Receiver Finish/Material	Case-hardened steel
Butt Stock/Forend	Oiled satin finish walnut, checkered
Stock Buttpad	Steel, crescent shape, leather butt cover
Stock LOP	13.0 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	2.4 lbs.
Trigger Style	Single stage
Safety	Lever pin
Magazine	10-round tube
Sights	Adj. buckhorn rear, dovetailed gold bead front
Warranty	1 year
Telephone	(540) 722-2017
Website	TaylorsFirearms.com
Made In	Italy





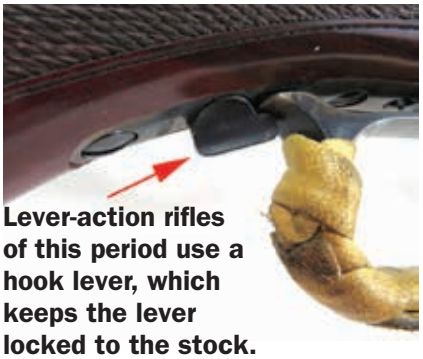
Old-time roll marks on the tang identify the Taylor's as a Model 1873. Uberti manufactured the rifles to the specs provided by Taylor's; in fact, all three rifles were manufactured by Uberti.

Uberti 1873 Competition Model 342905 357 Magnum, $1249

The 1873 Competition was the least traditional of the rifles tested due to the rubber recoil pad. Some testers liked it; others didn't. The rubber recoil pad was flat, not curved like the other butts, so it came up to the

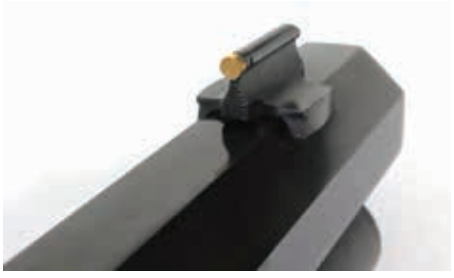


Right: The Comanchero featured a leather-wrapped loop, which some testers thought helped shooting comfort.



Lever-action rifles of this period use a hook lever, which keeps the lever locked to the stock.







Above: A semi-buckhorn rear sight is the standard on these lever-action rifles. Center: We liked the front-blade sight due to the brass bead and the serration facing the shooter, which cut glare. Right: Shooting for speed, the Taylor's slicker action and trigger offers tighter groups.







Left: We liked the look and comfort of the leather-covered Taylor's buttstock. Center: We noticed a small bit of checkering chipped away during use. There are some areas where a bump or a bang will knock off a piece of wood. Right: That protrusion behind the trigger is the safety system. It needs to be pressed in via the lever before the rifle can be fired. The Taylor's Comanchero got this part right because the safety was easy to deactivate.



Left: The Taylor's is on top of a replica Model '73 that does not have a short-stroke lever. Notice the difference in how much less the Taylor's lever need to travel forward. Right: Similar to the Model '66, the Model '73 rifles use a brass cartridge carrier that transports a cartridge from the magazine tube to the chamber.



shoulder fast and did help with recoil, especially when shooting 357 magnum loads. The stock is a straight grip like on the Yellow Boy. The Taylor's was a pistol grip style. The rubber buttpad also increased the LOP by half an inch. We did appreciate the rubber recoil pad because it helped mitigate recoil, especially with 357

UBERTI 1873 COMPETITION MODEL 34290 357 MAGNUM, $1249

GUN TESTS GRADE: B+

The Uberti was the easiest to load to capacity and had a nice, crisp trigger. The flat shotgun-style buttplate was fast to the shoulder. We liked the sights. The lever was stiff on the rear stroke, and the safety system spring was too stiff. We expected a bit more for a rifle marketed as an 1873 Competition rifle.



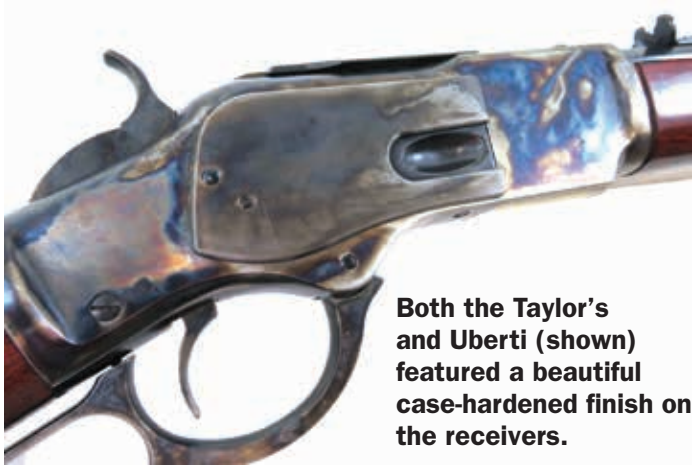
Action Type	Lever
Overall Length	39.0 in.
Height Unboxed	7.7 in.
Width	1.3 in.
Weight Unboxed/Unloaded	8.0 lbs.
Weight As Tested/Loaded	9.8 lbs.
Barrel Length/Twist	20 in.; 1:18.75 RH
Barrel Finish/Material	Blued steel
Receiver Finish/Material	Case-hardened steel
Butt Stock/Forend	Oiled satin-finish walnut, smooth
Stock Buttpad	Rubber, flat
Stock Length of Pull	13.5 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	3.6 lbs.
Trigger Style	Single stage
Safety	Lever pin
Magazine	10-round tube
Sight, Rear	Adjustable buckhorn
Sight, Front	Dovetailed gold bead
Warranty	5 year
Telephone	(800) 264-4962
Website	Uberti-USA.com
Made In	Italy



The Uberti Competition's safety system used a stiff spring to push out a tab that required users to squeeze the lever to the stock, distracting them from squeezing the trigger. Uberti should fix this.



Unlike the Model 1866, the Model 1873 incorporated a dust cover. It slides open on the forward stroke of the lever and stays open unless the user shuts it.



Both the Taylor's and Uberti (shown) featured a beautiful case-hardened finish on the receivers.



The forend was smooth. If we owned this rifle, we'd add decorative brass tacks for better traction and consistent support hand placement.



This is an all-business 1873 made to excel in competition. The fit and finish of the rifle was good, and the action is enhanced so it operates more smoothly than a standard 1873. It includes a short-stroke lever to decrease the time between shots.



The Uberti's front sight is dovetailed and set with a screw. We liked the brass bead because it made aiming on a dark target a bit easier.



The Competition prefers performance over tradition. The rubber buttpad increases LOP by half an inch and dampens recoil from 357 rounds.







During speed shooting with the Uberti at 15 yards, above, we noticed larger groups due the stiffer action and safety system operation. Right: At 50 yards with a rest, the Uberti proved to be plenty accurate, but these rifles were made more for speed.

Magnum ammunition. The rubber also adhered to the shoulder. Uberti makes the 1873 Competition to fill a need for a Model 1873 that is competition ready, and for the most part, the company has succeeded. While the fit and finish of the rifle was good, the action is enhanced so it operates more smoothly than a standard '73, and it includes a short-stroke lever to decrease the time between shots.

The Competition has a case-hardened receiver, lever, and hammer, while the barrel and magazine tube are deeply blued. The oil-finish smooth stock is fitted well. This is an all-business '73 made to excel in competition. The semi-buckhorn rear sight is adjustable for elevation via a ladder and windage via a brass punch and hammer. The front sight is dovetailed into the barrel, and the blade sports a brass bead, which makes aiming the sights easier than the black sights of the Cimarron. The bright brass dot shows up well on dark targets. A set screw holds the front sight base in place.

Both the Uberti and Taylor's rifles have a safety system that requires the lever to be squeezed fully flush to the frame to fire the rifle. A small spring that makes the safety tab protrude was very stiff on the Uberti, and it caused a few testers to short-stroke the lever and not be able to fire a shot. Some competitors replace the spring with a lighter spring so it is easier to disengage the safety. The testers who had issues soon learned to squeeze the lever fully home before firing. We also noticed on the closing stroke of the lever there was a bit more resistance compared to the Taylor's and Cimarron. We feel that if you are going to manufacture a competition rifle, these details should be addressed at the factory. The trigger was crisp and light, but the safety lever required the user to squeeze the lever loop to the stock to fire the rifle, which distracted us from squeezing the trigger.

As we collected range data, we found the muzzle velocity of the Competition was noticeably less than the other two rifles. The Blazer Brass 357 Magnums loaded with a 158-grain JHP gave us a best five-shot group of 0.92 inches. We noticed the Uberti lagged behind in accuracy with the 38 Special ammunition.

The Uberti was fast to target and with a follow-up shot. In fast fire at 15 yards, our five-shot groups measured 5 inches. The Uberti came in second to the Taylor's in speed due to the Uberti's heavy safety system lever. We also felt the straight loops of the Uberti and Cimarron were more comfortable to lever fast. The Taylor's had a curved loop that was not as comfortable.

Our Team Said: We liked the Competition for its ability to shoulder fast. While it is not traditional looking, it makes shooting the rifle easier and more comfortable. The action was not as slick as we expected, nor was the safety system competition-friendly. This rifle needed a bit more work to be a true competition rifle.

Written and photographed by Robert Sadowski, using evaluations from Gun Tests team testers. **GT**

Deep-Penetrating Heavy-Bullet 9mm Loads: Pretty Good Picks

In this test of heavier pistol loads, we selected rounds from Hornady, Federal, Buffalo Bore, Remington, Winchester, Fiocchi, DoubleTap, and SIG Sauer. What should you be carrying?

The 9mm Luger cartridge is the most popular handgun centerfire round in the market today. It's easy to understand why: The 9mm is a powerful number with high velocity and good accuracy potential, and it can offer deep penetration with the proper loads. Also, the 9mm is controllable in compact handguns by shooters with modest experience, and many very experienced shooters favor the 9mm as well. At the same time, the 9mm has a well-documented string of failures with non-expanding loads and loads lacking sufficient velocity and energy to ensure penetration. This just proves all jacketed-hollow-point bullets are not created equal, and too little penetration may not stop an assailant. The ideal load should have a balance of expansion and penetration. The 147-grain 9mm has been criticized by some for lacking expansion potential. The 147-grain load originally was designed to meet FBI requirements for deep penetration and barrier penetration. Expansion was modest. Many 147-grain loads still meet this criteria, while others demonstrate greater expansion. A new choice is the 135-grain bullet weight. This projectile is designed to provide greater velocity than the 147-grain JHP while offering greater penetration than the popular 124-grain expanding bullet.

We tested two 135-grain loads along with ten 147-grain JHP loads and a single 150-grain JHP as well as a heavyweight 165-grain combination. For those living in a true four-season climate that find themselves likely to face heavily bundled adversaries, these loads offer optimal performance. Anyone needing penetration against light cover might consider these loads. A follow-up question would be are they the best choice for personal defense? We believe that some of the 147-grain loads provide a good choice for personal-defense use compared to light-bullet loads with less expansion. The HST, as an example, offers excellent expansion and deep penetration in water.

We used a new Glock 19X as a test gun. The barrel length at about 4 inches is a compromise between service pistols and subcompact handguns. We fired three cartridges of each load to average expansion and penetration in water. We also fired three five-shot groups for accuracy at 25 yards. The remaining rounds were fired for function testing. During the test, there were no function problems of any type. Accuracy was likewise good in every case, with some loads being more accurate than others.



Buffalo Bore
Standard Pressure
147-grain JHP 24I

We bought these for $27.36/20 at BuffaloBore.com. This is a standard-pressure-rated load with plenty of momentum. Velocity is 998 fps. Accuracy is good. For some reason control was no more difficult than the slower loads, perhaps because of fast-burning powder, but most likely the 9mm's general pleasant firing characteristics. While the Fiocchi and Winchester loads had less recoil, we did not find the Buffalo Bore load daunting at all. The question is, do you believe in one hard hit or two or three softer hits and use a +P load? Only the shooter may answer that question, and it depends upon personal ability. The Buffalo Bore load is controllable by those who practice, and it offers good penetration and expansion without +P pressure. Penetration was 21 inches of water. The jacket comprised part of the expanded diameter at an impressive 0.75 inch.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



Federal Premium Hydra-Shok
Deep 135-Grain PD9HS5H

We bought this for $20/20 at LuckyGunner.com. This new loading, introduced within the past few months, isn't the same as the previous 135-grain Low Recoil Federal cartridge. The bullet design is optimized for penetration, and in our test, we got an average of 22 inches of penetration. The Hydra-Shok bullet features a fold-over crimp on the jacket, which we believe is designed to keep the bullet jacket from opening too soon. Velocity is higher than expected at 1035 fps. Total expansion was the greatest of any load tested at 0.79 inch;

9MM LUGER LOAD PERFORMANCE DATA

Gun: Glock 19X	Average Velocity (fps)	Muzzle Energy (ft.-lbs.)	Average Accuracy (in.)	IPSC Power Factor	Expanded Width (in.)	Retained Weight (gr.)	Penetration In Water (in.)
135 Hornady FlexLock	1044	327	1.9	141	0.48	135/100%	24
135 Federal Hydra-Shok Deep	1035	321	2.4	140	0.79	133/98%	22
147 Federal HST P9HST2	1006	330	2.2	148	0.68	147/100%	22
147 Federal HST +P P9HST4	1030	346	2.3	151	0.70	147,100%	20
147 Buffalo Bore Standard	1006	330	2.3	148	0.75	146/99%	21
147 Remington Golden Saber	940	288	2.4	138	0.70	147/100%	24
147 Winchester PDX1 Defender	980	313	2.2	144	0.57	147/100%	20
147 Fiocchi JHP	952	296	1.9	140	0.46	147/100%	24
147 Buffalo Bore HC Flat Point	1060	367	2.0	156	0.36	147/100%	48+
147 DoubleTap JHP	1121	410	2.5	165	0.54	147/100%	22
147 Hornady XTP 90282	955	298	1.9	140	0.55	147/100%	22
147 SIG Sauer Elite V-Crown	962	302	2.3	141	0.57	147/100%	20
150 Federal Micro HST	870	252	2.5	131	0.60	150/100%	20
165 DoubleTap Equalizer	960	338	10.5	158	.55/.355	158/96%	20/18

Notes: *Average Velocity and standard deviation readings were obtained by firing four five-shot strings over a Competition Electronics Pro Chrono. Ambient temperature: 86 degrees. Elevation: 815 feet above sea level. ● The accuracy figures are the average of two five-shot groups. For accuracy, we fired the test gun from a benchrest at a 15-yard target. ● To calculate IPSC power factor, multiply bullet weight in grains by the velocity in fps, then divide by 1000. ● The retained-weight column shows the recovered bullet weight as a percentage of the actual bullet weight.*

however, this was due to a part of the jacket extending from the 0.59-inch mushroom. That shard would still be effective regardless.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



Federal Premium HST 147-Grain P9HST2

We bought this for $35/50 rounds from LuckyGunner.com. The 147-grain bullet features the popular HST design, which is intended as an improvement over the Hydra-Shok. The HST offers an advantage in barrier penetration. We do not test barrier penetration, but expansion in water was very good and so was penetration. This load proved accurate and exhibited a clean powder burn. We felt that the HST provided optimum performance. This is a load that would convince shooters to adopt the 147-grain load over the 124-grain JHP. At 1006 fps with 22 inches of penetration and 0.68-inch recovered diameter, this is a good choice.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



Federal Premium HST +P 147-grain P9HST4

We bought this for $24/50 rounds from AmmunitionDepot.com — a good buy on this load. This appears to be the same bullet used in the standard-pressure loading. The HST +P is an answer to those looking for increased velocity and performance in the 147-grain weight. However, the standard-pressure load is faster than almost all standard-pressure 147-grain loads anyway, which usually average 930 to 980 fps, so Federal did something there. On average, the 147-grain HST +P is 24 fps faster than the standard-pressure loading. This may not seem worthwhile, but we did not expect bullet performance to be as different as it was. Two inches less penetration was achieved with a bullet that expands to .70 versus .68. For civilian versus law-enforcement shooters, this performance might be a better choice, but when a non +P load offers good performance, there is little incentive to add pressure. No increase in recoil was noted.

GUN TEST GRADE: A

Hornady Critical Duty FlexLock +P 135-Grain 90226

We bought this for $22.50/25 rounds from LuckyGunner.com. This load



offers excellent barrier penetration, according to Hornady and agency testing. Our water test showed a bullet that drove to 24 inches in water testing and expanded consistently to 0.48 inch. (Bullet #2 made a dent in the fifth jug; #3 was stuck in the #4 jug's outer jacket.) Every bullet looked exactly the same, with the most consistent expansion of the test. The Hornady bullet offered excellent accuracy as well, tying the Fiocchi loading for most accurate and only in second place for accuracy by splitting hairs. The Hornady bullet has plenty of penetration, and we feel that this load is a serious contender for law-enforcement use. If traveling in country inhabited by big cats and feral dogs, this is a good choice. The needs of law enforcement and the needs of home-defense shooters may be different, but this is an outstanding loading for either group.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



Winchester PDX1 Defender 147-Grain S9MMPDB1

We bought this for $20/20 rounds at TargetSportsUSA.com. The Winchester PDX Defender is a bonded-core design like the rest of the loads tested. The Winchester load breaks 940 fps and offers good control. Accuracy is good, and the powder burn is clean. Muzzle flash is limited. In other words, this is a service-grade loading. Penetration is optimal, and the bullet expands to 0.57 inch reliably. The Winchester load is a viable choice with good performance.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



Remington HD Ultimate Defense 147-Grain Brass-Jacketed HP 28946

We bought this for $26/20 rounds from MidwayUSA.com. The Golden Saber used a brass jacket over a lead bullet. The jacket is actually designed to be part of the wound mechanism. It is designed for the rigors of law enforcement, but non-LE shooters can buy it. The Golden Saber expanded to .70 inch, excellent results. Velocity was 940 fps and penetration a deep 24 inches. The Golden Saber is accurate and fired a total of 50 trouble-free rounds.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



Buffalo Bore Outdoorsman Hard Cast Lead Flat Nose 147-Grain 24L/20

We bought this one for $26/20 at MidwayUSA.com. This isn't a jacketed-bullet load, but is rather a hard-cast flat-nose bullet intended for defensive use against larger animals. Many folks use the 9mm for personal defense, and rather than purchase a Magnum revolver for occasional use in the wild, they might find it handy to load the 9mm with high-penetration bullets. FMJ loads typically cut a small wound path, but the Flat Point should create more damage. We found the Buffalo Bore load is a strong choice at a solid 1060 fps average. We cannot tell you the true water penetration because we gave up at 48 inches. We tried to capture the bullet in 42 inches of water, or seven jugs, and it sailed through. Next, we tried eight jugs at 48 inches, the limit of the fixtures we use for holding the water jugs. It sailed through. The exit hole was more ragged than we have seen with FMJ loads. We felt that this is more than adequate penetration. We are not rating this loading compared to the others because it is unique, but it certainly fits in with the deep-penetrating 9mm line of this report. In an urban situation, it's probably not the right choice because it might strike a person beyond your target. Penetration is at least in 357 Magnum territory.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



DoubleTap +P 147-Grain JHP

We bought this for $22.71/20 at DoubleTapAmmo.net. This is the fastest load tested at 1121 fps. That is 38 Super category. Yet, there were no adverse pressure signs in the spent cases. The 147-grain JHP penetrated 22 inches of water and expanded to 0.55 inch. We did not recognize the bullet used, but it appears to be a design intended to limit early penetration. We do not think it is a bonded design, although the jacket and bullet stayed together. This load certainly caused a ruckus in the water jugs. We think that a combination

of careful powder selection and long-loading the bullet allowed the company to achieve this velocity. This load is worth considering, but it should be fired in a service pistol such as the Glock 19X, not a compact handgun, to maximize its effects.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



SIG Sauer Elite V-Crown 147-Grain E9MMA3-20

This was available for $15/20 at MidwayUSA.com, or about 75 cents a round, one of the lower-priced choices in the test. For a new company, SIG Elite has achieved a footprint in the market quickly. The V-Crown hollow point is one reason. The 147-grain V-Crown averaged 962 fps, right in the league with several other loads with practically identical velocity. The V-Crown was also a good performer, with penetration of 20 inches and expansion to 0.57 inch. The loading exhibited a clean powder burn and good accuracy.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



Hornady Custom XTP 147-Grain 90282

The Extreme Terminal Performance (XTP) bullet features a good balance of expansion and penetration, with penetration considered the more vital component. The 147-grain XTP is well balanced and often shows good accuracy at long range. In this case, the XTP clocked 955 fps. Penetration in water was a very uniform 24 inches. Expansion was 0.52 inch. This loading is also accurate, and controlling it isn't difficult.

GUN TEST GRADE: A



Federal Premium Micro HST 150-Grain P9HST5S

This cost $24.75/20 rounds at LuckyGunner.com. It is a specialty load intended for use in compact handguns. It is less difficult to get a heavy bullet to consistently perform well with cycle reliability at velocity below 1000 fps versus a low-recoil lower-energy 115-grain bullet. Federal managed to set the velocity at 870 fps and maintain good function, and this bullet is designed to open at modest velocity. Barrier penetration was not a consideration in the design. The bullet expands to 0.60-inch caliber while penetrating to 20 inches. The 150-grain HST cannot be faulted on the basis of expansion. Recoil is low. For personal-defense in smaller handguns, this load makes the grade. We rated it down a half grade because its energy is low compared to the other offerings.

GUN TEST GRADE: A-



Fiocchi 147-Grain JHP 9APDHP

We bought this one for $20.75/50 rounds at LuckyGunner.com. It cost $13/20 rounds at MidwayUSA.com. This is an affordable loading in a 50-round box and a fair price in the 20-round box. Even if you choose another load to wear out in public, this one strikes to the same point of impact as other 147-grain loads and offers a good price point for practice. The Fiocchi load at 952 fps average is pleasant to fire and is the most accurate loading tested. The Fiocchi JHP heavyweight offers what many are looking for, a balance of expansion and penetration that favors penetration. Penetration is a long 24 inches, stopping in the skin of the fourth water jug consistently. Expansion is 0.46 inch. If this load is your choice, you'll have an emphasis on control, accuracy as well as penetration. While we prefer more expansion, this load does what a 147-grain JHP is designed to do. We rated it down a half grade based on expansion, but we can't overlook that this loading costs less for 50 rounds than 20 of most of the competing loads.

GUN TEST GRADE: A- (BEST BUY)



DoubleTap 165-grain JHP

This cost $25 for a 20-round box at DoubleTapAmmo.net. This is an unusual load, a 115-grain JHP over a 50-grain solid disk. DoubleTap offers these in the Equalizer line. Velocity would necessarily be low due to the heavyweight combination, we thought. The 115-grain JHP isn't going to expand as much at low velocity and should penetrate more deeply, we felt, and the testing bore some of this out. The load clocked 965 fps, which is plenty fast considering this is the heaviest bullet tested. The 115-grain JHP penetrated to 23 inches and expanded to 0.54 inch

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while losing the jacket. The 0.355-inch disk penetrated to 16, 16, and 18 inches in our testing. Multiple-projectile loads are not intended to be super-accurate, and we saw that is SOP for this design. The projectiles were a finger-width apart at 7 yards, and, surprisingly, at 10 yards, they were perhaps two finger widths apart. At 20 yards, the story was different, with the two projectiles 4 to 6 inches apart and neither striking to the point of aim. We wanted to be fair and consider the potential of this loading despite its drawbacks. With the slower velocity than usually posted with a 115-grain JHP, this bullet penetrated deeper, expanded less, and lost its jacket. The disk penetrated to 17 inches on average. The problem would be this isn't a load for hostage rescue or precision shooting, but then personal defense or home defense seldom is. A multiple-projectile load would exhibit a five-shot group of perhaps 10 inches, which is outside our acceptable range, but then the load met its design parameter.

GUN TEST GRADE: B

Our Team Said: When testing 9mm Luger ammunition in the past, we have experienced up to a 100% deviation in penetration, with some 77- to 124-grain loads reaching 6 to 7 inches in water and others penetrating 12 to 16 inches. Here, penetration generally ranged from 18 to 24 inches. So, for self defense, choose any of the A or A- ranked rounds and see what you like in your gun. The top five have excellent performance. The Winchester PDX is the most controllable, while the DoubleTap load has the greatest energy. But the Buffalo Bore standard pressure, DoubleTap +P , SIG V-Crown and Federal HST 9mms are also excellent choices.

Written and photographed by Gun Tests *staff.* **GT**

COMING UP IN GUN TESTS

● How many times have you heard someone say, "Shooting a pistol is simple, it is just not easy." Shooting a pistol should be easy — align the sights and press the trigger, right? Hitting a golf ball should be easy. You have a big stick, and the ball is sitting still. Should be easy. But neither of these things are easy to do. But there are some things you can do to simplify the process and become a better shooter.

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