GUN TESTS®

THE CONSUMER RESOURCE FOR THE SERIOUS SHOOTER

$5.95 December 2018/Vol. XXX, No. 12



SNUBNOSE REVOLVERS

We pit three 38 Special wheelguns to find the top short-barrel choice. Tested: S&W's Model 637-2, the 6-shot Taurus 856, and S&W's lightweight M&P Bodyguard 38.

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308 WINCHESTER BOLT RIFLES

Tested: Ruger American Rifle Standard 6903, Savage Model 12FV 18393, Savage Axis II XP 57095, and Mossberg's Trophy Hunter. ● Page 14

2018 GUNS OF THE YEAR

We look through 12 months of handgun, rifle, and shotgun evaluations and pick our favorites. ● Page 21



BEST IN CLASS REVOLVER '18

Ruger GP100 KGP-141 38 Special +P 357 Magnum



BEST IN CLASS PISTOL '18

SIG Sauer P226 Nitron E26R-9-BSS 9mm Luger; Caliber X-Change Kit in 357 SIG



BEST IN CLASS RIFLE '18

Ruger American Rifle Ranch 300 Blackout



BEST IN CLASS SHOTGUN '18

Mossberg 590 Tactical Heat Shield Synthetic 50665 12 Gauge

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

DOWNRANGE

SHORT SHOTS



Todd Woodard

By the time you read this, the midterm elections will have already happened, and we'll know if more federal regulations and laws restricting our civil rights are on their way. I would like to say that the congressional outcomes don't mean anything for two years, as long as President Trump is in office. But that's simply not true. PDT has shown an irresolute streak on publicly considering more gun regulations, though, to be fair, we haven't seen any new laws at the federal level. I recognize Trump is a master-class troller of the gun haters and the media, so perhaps his musings are simply bait for his adversaries. But because I'm a 2nd Amendment absolutist, I'd like to see no further restrictions on gun rights. In fact, I'd like to see Trump start talking about rolling back gun regulations. But the other side is pushing more laws and red tape. To wit:

● David Chipman, a retired Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) agent and now a senior policy adviser at Gabby Giffords' Courage to Fight Gun Violence group, says AR-15 rifles should be regulated like machine guns. Chipman told Hill.TV's Buck Sexton and Krystal Ball, "To me, if you want to have a weapon of war, the same gun that was issued to me as a member of [the] ATF SWAT team, it makes sense that you would have to pass a background check, the gun would have to be in your name, and there would be a picture and fingerprints on file." Well, for one, I'm glad Chipman is out of government service and out in the open where his views can be confronted. His argument that the AR-15 is a "weapon of war" could also be applied to the M14, M1, and various other semi-auto mechanisms. Oh, and the 1911 and Beretta 92 as well. That's where his argument leads.

● Reuters reported that U.S. gun-control advocates have outspent gun-rights groups by more than 40 percent on the congressional elections. "Boosted largely by the personal fortune of billionaire Michael Bloomberg, who is considering a 2020 presidential run, the gun-control war chest almost entirely benefits Democrats." Gun-control groups, including Giffords' and Everytown for Gun Safety, have spent $20.2 million on the elections, well over the $14.1 million spent by pro-gun groups, according to data released by the U.S. Federal Election Commission.

● In mid-October, Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), House Minority Leader, told parents and students from Parkland, Florida that gun control would be at the top of the Democrats' agenda if they win back the House in November's midterms, according to the *Miami Herald*.

I guess we will see what transpires in January 2019. **GT**

GUN TESTS CREDO

REMEMBER: BE SAFE, BE SECURE, BE AWARE

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THE CONSUMER RESOURCE FOR THE SERIOUS SHOOTER

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GUN TESTS ACCEPTS NO COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING

GUN TESTS ® (ISSN No. 1042-6450) is published monthly by AG Media, Inc.; 111 Corporate Drive, Big Sandy, TX 75755-2446. Periodicals Postage Paid at Big Sandy, TX, and at additional mailing offices.

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Revenue Canada GST Account #128044658.

Subscriptions: $49 (U.S.) annually. Outside the U.S. and Canada $72 (U.S.) for one year, $144 (U.S.) for two years. Single copies $7.50 (U.S.). Bulk-rate subscriptions for organizations and educational institutions are available.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to: ***GUN TESTS***, P.O. Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535, or ***GUN TESTS***, P.O. Box 39, Norwich ON, N0J 1P0. **Canada Publishing Agreement** #40016479.

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38 Special Problem in 357 Mags

Reader Carr reports an issue shooting 38s in 357 chambers. And like many others, Reader Russ wants to know more about easy-to-operate 380s. Reader Steve likes the accessory articles.

Re "Cowboy Up with Lever Guns From Cimarron, Uberti, Taylor's," November 2018

I enjoyed the article on 38 Special lever-action rifles, but I think you missed a very important warning. The 38 Special and 357 Magnum are not interchangeable, for reasons other than the strength of the action. I have a Marlin lever action in 357 caliber. I decided to sight it in with 38 Special rounds and then change to 357 and adjust the sights. After about 20 or 30 rounds of 38 Special, I switched to 357. When I tried to rack in the second round, it wouldn't seat. The problem was that the 38 Special rounds carboned up the chamber, and when the 357 round was extracted, only about half of the cartridge came out. I had to have a gunsmith remove the front half of the casing. I only shoot 357 rounds in my rifle and revolver since then. I have never seen this in any article which discusses using 38 Special ammo in a 357 chamber. **— Carr**



Yes, shooting lead leads to leading, and shooting the shorter case can result in carbon build up. Thank you for the refresher. — Robert Sadowski

Re "380 ACP Shootout: New Models Versus a Time-Tested Veteran," August 2018

Dear Mr. Woodard: I have subscribed to Gun Tests magazine for several years now, and find each issue to be of extreme importance and full of unbiased reviews. Several guns that I own I purchased based upon your magazine's reviews. Could you possibly schedule an upcoming



test using the new S&W 380 EZ and compare it to the Springfield 911 and a few other quality 380s? I find now, in my seventh decade of life, it is becoming increasingly difficult to rack the slides on many of my semi-automatic pistols due to advanced arthritis in my hands.



Second, I have to live in California, which is a nanny state, unfortunately. But if I didn't, I would surely move to a more gun-friendly state where its citizens are pro-Second Amendment.

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.

California is anti-everything, and we gun owners are doing the best we can to keep and maintain our cherished Second Amendment rights. Keep up the great work testing firearms of all types and calibers. **— Russ**

Hey Russ: Thanks for the note. We covered both the EZ and the 911 in the August issue, which also included a Value Guide listing our most recent evaluations of 17 other 380 ACP pistols. Also, the EZ is excerpted in this issue as a Gun of the Year. — Todd Woodard

Hi, Todd. Thanks for putting out a terrific magazine. Your August 2018 article on the S&W M&P 2.0 EZ 380 interested me because I bought one this May to use in women-only pistol classes that I teach. Glad yours works. Mine not so much. From the start, mine refused half the time to hold open its slide after the last round was fired. It also occasionally stovepiped the last live round in a mag, caught vertically in the feed lips.

I began testing it by loading three rounds in the mags and shooting them dry, literally hundreds of times, many different ammos, recording all results. After a 700-round break-in (which didn't solve anything), I sent it back to S&W without my mags. They ask that you not send mags with a returning gun. I received it back a month later with a new barrel and what appeared to be a new slide. A "Passed function test" note was enclosed.

However, after further testing on my part, I found the issue was not fixed; it had the same problems. I returned it again after 400 more rounds of testing because of the same the hold-open and stovepipe problems. Just got it back with a "replaced slide-stop" note. Again not fixed. The magazine springs have always seemed to me to be unnecessarily soft, which I thought could induce such malfunctions. I tried springs from other 380 magazines in mine, but they did not fit properly.

So I made a couple of blocks to plug the S&W mags inside between the spring and baseplate, to add compression to the spring after the last round fires. As a result, the magazine capacity was reduced from 8 to 6, but the change created an immediate cure. My mag springs are way too soft to work, and surely I'm not the only one this has happened to. If your mags worked okay, maybe they've put a stronger spring in later mags. Anyway, just a caution to anyone looking at this gun.

Also, I should mention S&W now is aware of this mag-spring defect and has a "consumer advisory" out on it. Customers can call 1-800-331-0852, press "7," and a rep will send out two new mags. When I made the call, however, they first asked that I send in my defective mags. I said, "No thanks, send me the new mags first." **— Phil**

Auto-Ordnance Releases "Vengeance" Custom WWII M1 Carbine

Is the "Vengeance" rifle available with a NY-legal 10-round magazine? Thanks. **— Thad**

Thad, we contacted Frank Harris, VP sales and marketing for Kahr Firearms Group, for an answer. He said, "Currently, it is not, but if we have enough requests from NY and CA, we can create a NY- and CA-compliant model with a 10-round magazine. Our AOM140, the standard carbine with a 10-round



magazine, is currently available for both NY and CA sales." — tw

SIG Sauer Ask

Hi, Todd. Gun Tests is a valuable resource, one I find very helpful every month, and the same goes for Gun-Tests.com. I want to propose a possible article idea. Much of the activity in today's handgun arena revolves around compact, subcompact, and micro-compact handguns. And SIG Sauer is a major player. An article that compares and contrasts the following pistols would be interesting, helpful, and timely. They represent striker-fired, hammer-fired, DA/SA, DAO, polymer and steel/aluminum models. In short, the pistols are valid examples of the small pistols in the universe. All of the pistols are chambered in 9mm, made by SIG Sauer: P365, P320, P224, and the P290. What do you think? I won't get my feelings hurt if you shoot it down. —Dennis

Hey Dennis: We don't do a lot of single-manufacturer stories, but this angle has some promise. We did look at the P290RS in the November 2012 issue. We reviewed the P320 in the November 2016 issue. We haven't gotten around to the P365 and P224, so your idea is timely. Thanks for sending it. — tw

Smith & Wesson M&P 380 Shield EZ or Rock Island Armory Baby Rock 380 ACP

Todd: I am 76 years old and have read your articles on the above firearms. I am in the market for one that is easy to rack, handles recoil well, is accurate, easy to handle, and is easy to take apart and put back together to clean. Taking these attributes into consideration, which one of the two would you recommend? **— John**

Hey John: The EZ is a smaller gun, but it is very easy to rack. The Baby Rock is slightly larger. I'd advocate handling both and see which one suits your needs better. That's the only way to be sure. — tw

Different Bullet Weights and Shapes?

I first need to commend you on your objective (as humanly possible) evaluations of firearms and items associated with firearms. Your integrity and honesty are above reproach. Now for the question: This one is probably one of the most

obvious answers you will ever have to respond to, as well as naive. For this I apologize. Do you ever mix cartridges of the same caliber when evaluating a firearm; for example, full metal jacket and hollowpoints in the same magazine, or just one type in a magazine? If mixed, will it throw the timing off? **— W. in NY**

Hey W.: We do mix cartridges of different weights and bullet shapes when we're doing functional testing. Some guns don't like different bullet shapes, so we intentionally mix them when we're firing for familiarity to learn about stoppages. The bullet profiles generally don't make much difference in how a handgun feels — a 230-grain bullet creates the same recoil impulse regardless of whether it's a solid-jacket ball or a hollowpoint. The bullet weights and powder charges in the cases do change the recoil impulse, however. That changes the shooter's timing and response when he or she is riding the gun shot to shot. — tw





Re "Dry-Fire Trainers: Save Money While You Gain Performance," October 2018

I would like to commend the Gun Tests staff for the laser-dry-fire-trainer review in the October hard-copy issue of Gun Tests. This is exactly the kind of article that I am looking for and the kind that sets Gun Tests apart from the rest of the pack. I already have the self-defense firearms I need, so reviews about them are always interesting, but I don't plan to purchase any soon. Reviews of related products are of much more help to me personally.

I did not even know these laser-dry-fire products existed and certainly did not realize they are as sophisticated as those reviewed in the article. This is something I can use with the firearms I already have. I do plan to buy a dry-fire laser set up, and I will start with the products you reviewed and research them a little more — but a purchase of one of them is certain. Thank you for reviewing related firearm products and accessories. **— Steve**

Thanks and you're welcome. —tw

Hearing Protection

If you guys do a piece on hearing protection, I've got a couple of suggestions. I have experience with both the Walker Razor XV BT in ear and the Walker Excel BT over the ear. Both have their advantages and disadvantages, but are nice quality. When the big guns come out, however, I use Howard Leight Impact Pro units, which I believe have the highest noise attenuation of any active set. They are the only headsets I don't have to double up with ear plugs for those muzzle-brake-equipped large-caliber firearms. Keep up the superior work that you do. — Paul

Paul: We hear you. Thanks for your insights. — tw

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New Snubnose Revolvers Under $400: S&W, Taurus Compete

We pit three 38 Special revolvers to find the top snubby in this group. Tested: Smith & Wesson's Model 637-2, the 6-shot Taurus 856, and S&W's lightweight M&P Bodyguard 38.

Snubnose revolvers are viable options when deciding what type of self-defense firearm to purchase. They are easy to use and easy to conceal. Plus, the 38 Special cartridge is an excellent self-defense round, and 38 Special +P loads are almost as powerful as a 357 Magnum rounds. We procured three snubnose revolvers under $400 — the Smith & Wesson Model 637-2, Smith & Wesson M&P Bodyguard 38, and the Taurus Model 856 — to see which one would come out as top dog.

In our opinion, all three of these snubnose revolvers are good choices for concealed carry and home defense. All have attributes that make them well suited for conceal carry, such as light weight, small grips, and smooth, snag-free outside edges. Sights are a big consideration, and we like them large and easy to use, and if we have the ability to modify the sight, that is a plus in our book. The triggers also need to be smooth because these revolvers will mostly likely be fired in double-action (DA) mode. Plus, we think the ability to fire 38 Special and 38 Special +P ammo through the revolver enhances its versatility.



We felt the S&W Model 637-2 (left) offered the best grip, +P ammo capability, light weight, and excellent accuracy. The new Taurus 856 (center) offers six shots, good sights, and good accuracy, but despite its steel frame, it was not compatible with +P ammo. The S&W M&P Bodyguard 38 (right) offers light weight, excellent sights, and +P capability, but it comes with a smallish grip.



From the rear, it's easy to see the grip proportions are very different. We liked the grip of 637-2 (left) best, then the 856 grip (center). The Bodyguard 38 grip (right) offered a good grip angle but lacked recoil management.

How We Tested

Since these snubnose revolvers are made for concealed carry at short range, we tested at 15 yards using a rest and fired in single-action (SA) mode with the Model 637-2 and Model 856; the M&P Bodyguard 38 is double action only (DAO). With short sight radii, compact grips, and heavy DA triggers on the Model 637-2 and Model 856, we did not expect tack-driving accuracy, but we were surprised at how well we could group shots using the trigger in SA mode. In our opinion, the DA/SA trigger mode on the 637-2 and 856 has an edge over the DAO M&P Bodyguard 38, especially when aiming at a target farther away. The SA trigger mode allows you to more accurately squeeze off a shot. Practically speaking, these revolvers will most likely be used at very close distance and the trigger fired in DA mode. The Bodyguard 38 had a lighter trigger pull in DA than the 637-2 and 856,

which allowed better accuracy. We ran a variety of ammunition through the revolvers with full-metal-jacket, lead-roundnose, and jacketed-hollow-point bullets of different weights. For our speed test, we fired two rounds in DA mode as fast as we could into an 8-inch paper plate at 15 yards and found these 38 Special snubnose revolvers had game. Here's why.

Taurus 856 Model 2-856021 38 Special, $278

The 856 was introduced this year and offers a 6-shot alternative to Taurus' Model 85 series of 5-shot concealable revolvers. The added round capacity only increased the width of the revolver by a fraction of an inch and added slightly more weight. We suspect that if Taurus chambered the 856 in 38 Special +P, the revolver would have been beefier and less concealed-carry friendly.

The 856 comes in a cardboard box, and our first impression once it was out of the package was how nicely the revolver settled in our hand. The new textured grip is hand-filling yet adds minimal bulk to the revolver. The plain matte-black finish was well executed, and the crane-to-frame fit was tight. A detent in the top of the crane locks the front of the cylinder into the frame. The cylinder is locked into the rear via a round pin in the extractor. The pin fits into a hole in the rear of the frame. There is no wiggle in the 856. It also had the tighter cylinder gap of all three snub noses. The grip feels comfortable in hand, with most shooters comfortably wrapping their small fingers at the very edge of the butt. This grip made the revolver slightly taller than the other two but it did not interfere with conceal carry.

The sights were fixed. The rear sight was a large groove milled out of the top of the top strap and the front sight was milled out of the barrel. The wide front ramp was serrated to reduce glare and the wide rear groove had a cut out to also reduce glare. We liked these sights a lot because the sights were large and the front sight was easily aligned in the rear groove. The barrel incorporates a shroud that protects the ejector rod.

The cylinder latch is pushed forward to swing out the cylinder. It was small and checkered so a speed loader can be used. The design of the grip also allows use of a speed loader. The hammer has a wide thumb pad that is coarsely checkered, allowing us to cock the revolver with confidence. The trigger is smooth and slightly wider than the trigger of the 637-2 and Bodyguard 38.

Loading up the 856 we noticed the grip did an excellent job of helping to manage recoil. The extra weight of the steel-frame 856 also helped to manage recoil. It is a pleasant snubnose to shoot. Shooting for accuracy, the

RANGE DATA

Armscor 38 Sp. 158-gr. FMJ	Smith & Wesson Model 637	Taurus Model 856	Smith & Wesson M&P Bodyguard 38
Average Velocity	800 fps	817 fps	762 fps
Muzzle Energy	225 ft.-lbs.	234 ft.-lbs.	204 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.0 in.	1.2 in.	2.0 in.
Average Group	1.1 in.	1.6 in.	2.1 in.

Federal Champion 38 Sp. 158-gr. LRN	Smith & Wesson Model 637	Taurus Model 856	Smith & Wesson M&P Bodyguard 38
Average Velocity	653 fps	652 fps	653 fps
Muzzle Energy	150 ft.-lbs.	149 ft.-lbs.	150 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.5 in.	1.0 in.	2.4 in.
Average Group	1.6 in.	1.6 in.	2.5 in.

Speer Gold Dot 38 Sp. 125-gr. GDHP	Smith & Wesson Model 637	Taurus Model 856	Smith & Wesson M&P Bodyguard 38
Average Velocity	808 fps	815 fps	795 fps
Muzzle Energy	181 ft.-lbs.	185 ft.-lbs.	175 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.4 in.	0.6 in.	2.2 in.
Average Group	1.6 in.	0.8 in.	2.3 in.

SIG Sauer 38 Sp. +P 125-gr. JHP	Smith & Wesson Model 637	Taurus Model 856*	Smith & Wesson M&P Bodyguard 38
Average Velocity	869 fps	NA	892 fps
Muzzle Energy	210 ft.-lbs.	NA	221 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	0.7 in.	NA	2.0 in.
Average Group	0.9 in.	NA	2.1 in.

*To collect accuracy data, we fired five-shot groups from a bench using a rest. Distance: 15 yards with open sights. We recorded velocities using a ProChrono digital chronograph set 10 feet from the muzzle. *Taurus Model 856 is not rated for 38 Special +P ammunition.*



The business ends of the three snubnoses show the 637-2 (left) and Bodyguard 38 (center) were more snag-free than the 856 (right).

856 tore up the black 2-inch-square target at 15 yards with Armscor 158-grain FMJs. This revolver shot to point of aim. With defensive Speer ammo loaded with 125-grain Gold Dot hollow points (GDHP), one tester fired a 0.6 inch 5-shot group. That's impressive accuracy out of such a inexpensive revolver. In rapid fire, the groups opened up because the trigger pull was a heavy 12 pounds, though the grip and smoothness made the pull seem less. We used an Uncle Mike's nylon Sidekick holster to carry the 856.

Our Team Said: We really liked this new Taurus. The 6-shot capacity did not make the revolver overly bulky, and the grips were hand-filling yet compact, so felt recoil was less noticeable. The sights were large and easy to use. We would have liked the 856 to be +P ammo compatible, but we recognize there might have been weight and profile trade-offs to gain this capacity. The street price for this revolver is very reasonable.

Smith & Wesson Model M&P Bodyguard 38 103039 38 Special +P, $348

Where the M&P Bodyguard 38 excelled was in its light weight; smooth, light trigger pull; and large, easy-to-acquire sights. It also featured a snag-free exterior that allowed the Bodyguard 38 to be drawn easily from a pant pocket or coat pocket.

The Bodyguard 38 comes in a soft case. First impression of this snubnose was its weight, or lack thereof. This revolver incorporates a polymer grip and side panels, which dramatically reduce weight. The frame is aluminum alloy, and the stainless-steel barrel has an aluminum shroud that completely covers the ejector rod. S&W did a great job of removing excess metal at the muzzle and around the ejector rod. The ejector rod on the Bodyguard 38 was the longest of the three revolvers, helping the shooter clear empties quickly.

To open the cylinder, the shooter pushes a serrated ambidextrous latch located behind the rear sight groove. A right- or left-handed shooter pushes the latch forward with a thumb to swing the cylinder out. The side of the latch is also serrated, so pushing the latch forward is easier. The Bodyguard 38 has a detent ball built in the front of the frame that locks the crane into the frame. Like with the other revolvers, the shooter needs to push the cylinder out of frame. It won't swing out on its own. This allows the cylinder to stay in battery in the event the cylinder latch is accidentally manipulated. It was also a new muscle memory task that needed to be learned because most revolvers have a left-side latch.

The crane-to-frame fit was tight with no wiggle. The rear of the cylinder is locked in via a star-shaped indent in the extractor that meshes with a star-shaped protrusion in a round section in the rear of the frame, which retracts when the cylinder latch is pushed forward. It should also be noted that the cylinder of the Bodyguard 38 rotates clockwise rather than the traditional counter-clockwise of most other S&W revolvers. Not that this makes a difference in use, but it shows S&W is pushing the design

TAURUS 856 MODEL 2-856021 38 SPECIAL, $278

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The 856 has a consistent trigger pull in double-action or single-action mode, a small grip that feels like a large grip, and it offers 6 shots in about the same package as a 5-shot revolver. The price is reasonable.



Action Type	Double action, single action
Overall Length	6.55 in.
Barrel Length	2.0 in.
Sight Radius	3.7 in.
Overall Height	4.8 in.
Maximum Width	1.4 in.
Weight Unloaded	22.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	22.9 oz.
Cylinder Gap	0.005 in.
Capacity	6
Frame Finish	Matte black steel
Barrel/Cylinder Finish	Matte black steel
Frame Front Strap Height	2.1 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.0 in.
Grip	Checkered rubber, finger grooves
Grip Thickness	1.0 in.
Grip Circumference	4.7 in.
Front Sight	Serrated ramp, fixed
Rear Sight	Groove, fixed
Trigger Pull Weight (DA)	12.0 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight (SA)	5.0 lbs.
Trigger Span (DA)	3.1 in.
Trigger Span (SA)	2.6 in.
Safety	Internal hammer block
Warranty	Unlimited lifetime
Telephone	(305) 624-1115
Website	TaurusUSA.com
Made In	Brazil



The front of the cylinder locks up via a detent in the top of the crane that locks into the frame.



The crane on the 856 mates up nearly seamlessly with the frame. The ejector rod is fully enclosed in the barrel shroud.

The 856 fired this group with Armscor 158-grain FMJs at 15 yards.

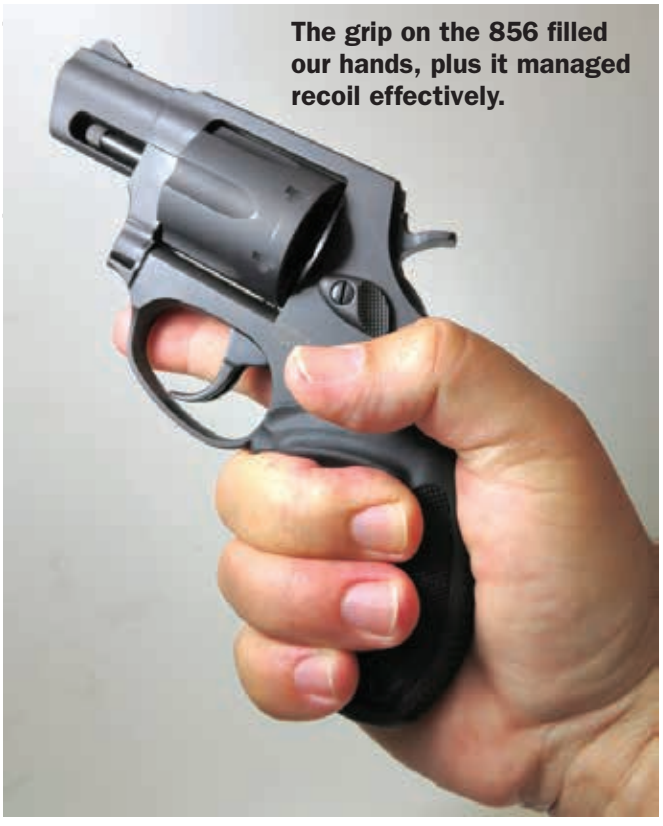


From the operator's view, the sights on the 856 appeared large, making the revolver easy to aim.





The rear of the cylinder on the 856 locks up with a pin in the ejector that fits in the hole in the back of the frame.



The grip on the 856 filled our hands, plus it managed recoil effectively.



Loading up the 856 we noticed the grip did an excellent job of helping to manage recoil. The extra weight of the steel-frame 856 also helped to manage recoil. It is a pleasant snubnose to shoot.



The Bodyguard offered a high hand hold.

of the revolver with use of polymers and mechanisms.

The front-ramp sight is pinned into the barrel shroud so you could replace it to match a specific load or change it to a more visible front sight, such as an XS Sight System standard dot tritium ($71; XSsights.com). The rear sight is a large, squared-off groove milled in the top strap with the rear scooped out to reduce sun glare. We liked these sights in use, and we liked the ability to modify them.

Where we think S&W could improve the Bodyguard 38 is in the grip. The grip allows the user to hold the revolver higher up and closer the axis of the bore, which means recoil is straighter back rather than causing muzzle flip. The grip, however, is small, and when firing +P loads, it transfers recoil. We would want a rubber grip with slightly larger palm swells to make the grip feel larger.

Another feature we liked about the Bodyguard 38 was its snag-free outside exterior. The cylinder had its front edge knocked off, and all the edges were smooth.

When using the +P ammo, we noticed recoil the most when firing the Bodyguard 38 compared to the other revolvers. The small hard-polymer grip transferred energy into the web of our hands, and some testers had their index-finger knuckles rapped by the rear of the trigger guard. When firing just 38 Special ammunition, the Bodyguard 38 recoil was more tolerable. The trigger pull was DAO and measured 8 pounds, with a slight bit of stacking just before the shot fired. Our 5-shot groups averaged 2 inches at 15 yards, which we thought was excellent for close-range work. We also noted the cylinder gap measured 0.011 inches, which is comparatively large. That dimension allowed some velocity to bleed out with some of the loads.

Our Team Said: We really like the Bodyguard 38 due to its light weight, +P capability, high grip hold, smooth trigger, and sights. The grip could be improved, in our opinion. The price was competitive.

Smith & Wesson Model 637-2 163050 38 Special +P, $389

The 637-2 is more of an old-school-style Smith from the 1950s. It reduces weight by using a lightweight aluminum frame and stainless-steel barrel and cylinder. "Airweight" is roll marked on the right side. It is an ounce heavier than the Bodyguard 38.

The 637-2 is actually a variation of the Model 37 Chiefs Special Airweight, and it integrates those time-tested features of the original with modern features. The 637-2

SMITH & WESSON M&P BODYGUARD 38 103039 38 SPECIAL +P, $348

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The M&P Bodyguard 38 was easily concealable and lightweight. The DAO trigger pull was smooth. Though it offers only five shots, it is well suited for conceal carry.



Action Type	Double Action Only
Overall Length	6.6 in.
Barrel Length	1.8 in.
Sight Radius	3.8 in.
Overall Height	4.2 in.
Maximum Width	1.3 in.
Weight Unloaded	14.2 oz.
Weight Loaded	15.1 oz.
Cylinder Gap	0.011 in.
Capacity	5
Frame Finish/Material	Matte black, aluminum alloy
Barrel/Cylinder Finish/Material	Matte black, stainless steel
Frame Front Strap Height	2.0 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.0 in.
Grip	Textured polymer, gray
Grip Thickness (max)	0.9 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	4.0 in.
Front Sight	Pinned front ramp
Rear Sight	Fixed notch
Trigger Pull Weight (DAO)	8.3 lbs.
Trigger Span (DAO)	2.9 in.
Safety	Internal hammer block
Warranty	None written
Telephone	(800) 331-0852
Website	Smith-Wesson.com
Made In	U.S.A.





Top: The Bodyguard had the longest ejector rod and offered good leverage for removing empties. Bottom: A detent in the frame locks the crane into the front of the cylinder. This was a very secure system with no wiggle or front-end shake.

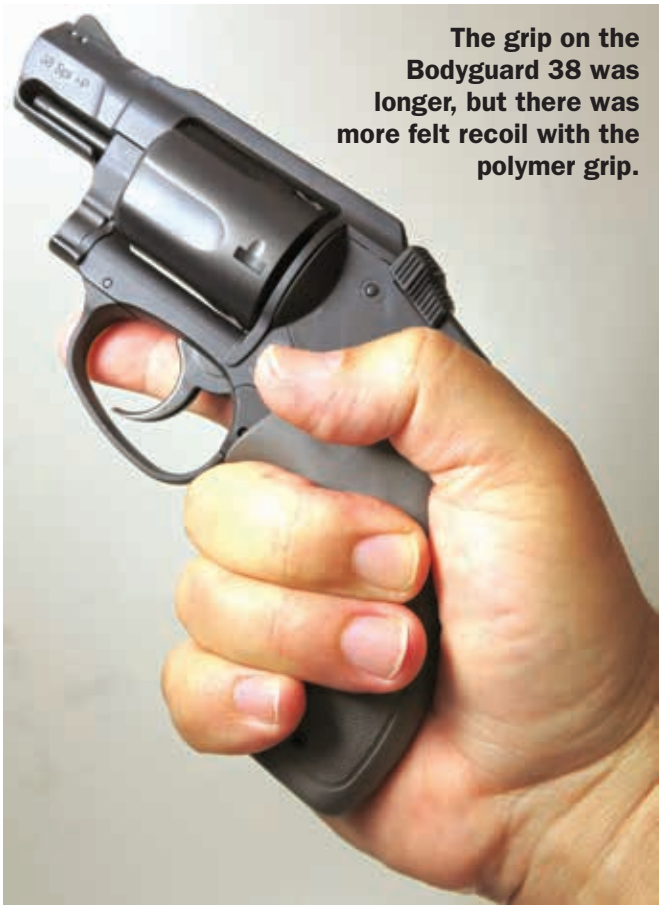


Above: The cylinder latch (shown above the arrow) is pushed toward the muzzle to release the cylinder from the frame. This is an unusual place for the latch.





The star-shaped protrusion in the rear of the frame mates with a star-shaped indent in the ejector rod to lock up the rear of the Bodyguard 38's cylinder.



The grip on the Bodyguard 38 was longer, but there was more felt recoil with the polymer grip.

Left: Like with the other revolvers, the shooter needs to push the cylinder out of frame. It won't swing out on its own. This allows the cylinder to stay in battery in the event the cylinder latch is accidentally manipulated. Most revolvers have a left-side latch, so this required some retraining.

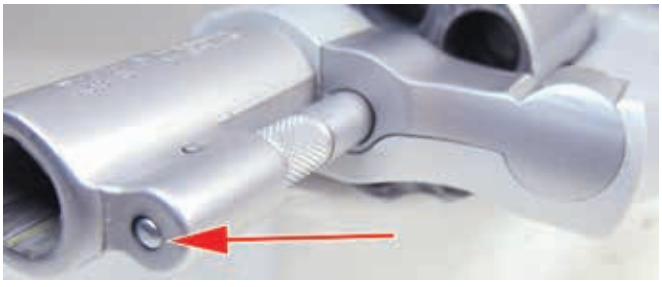
SMITH & WESSON MODEL 637-2 163050 38 SPECIAL +P, $389

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The 637 had all the right quality and features in a concealable revolver: consistent trigger pull, DA or SA trigger mode, recoil absorbing grip, and lightweight.



Action Type	Double Action/Single Action
Overall Length	6.3 in.
Barrel Length	1.8 in.
Sight Radius	3.5 in.
Maximum Width	4.1 in.
Weight Unloaded	14.4 oz.
Weight Loaded	15.3 oz.
Cylinder Gap	.007 in.
Capacity	5
Frame Finish/Material	Matte silver/aluminum alloy
Barrel/Cylinder Finish/Material	Matte silver/stainless steel
Frame Front Strap Height	1.5 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.0 in.
Grip	Checkered rubber, finger grooves
Grip Thickness (max)	1.1 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	4.7 in.
Front Sight	Ramp, fixed
Rear Sight	Groove, fixed
Trigger Pull Weight (DA)	12.0 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight (SA)	3.8 lbs.
Trigger Span (DA)	3.0 in.
Trigger Span (SA)	2.5 in.
Safety	Internal hammer block
Warranty	None written
Telephone	(800) 331-0852
Website	Smith-Wesson.com
Made In	U.S.A.





Above: The crane-to-frame lock up on the 637-2 was tight. Note the under-barrel lug holds a ball detent (arrow) that locks the front of the cylinder. Right: The ejector started empties out of the chamber, but it took gravity to completely remove them. Crane and frame mating was tight. The cylinder rotated counter clockwise.

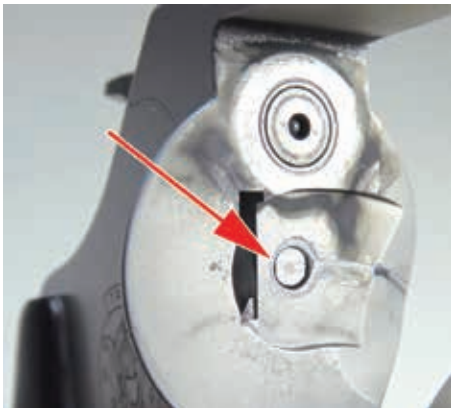


In hand, the 637-2 offers a good grip. We needed to curl a finger under the butt for most comfort.





Top: The sights were light colored, which was good for dark-colored targets, but they are shiny in sunlight. Bottom: Using the 637-2, our shooters fired this 5-shot group with SIG Sauer 125-grain +P ammo.



The cylinder locks in the rear via a pin in the ejector that fits in the hole in the back of the frame.

comes in a hard-plastic foam-lined case. The finish is a matte silver, with the aluminum frame appearing slightly lighter in tone than the barrel and cylinder. The hammer and trigger are matte black. It is a sharp-looking revolver.

The cylinder latch is traditional and located on the left side of the revolver. It is small and coarsely textured for a sure grip when pressing it forward to swing out the cylinder. It will not interfere when using a speed loader. The 5-shot cylinder locks in the back via a pin in the extractor that fits into a hole in the back of the frame. The front lock up is via the ejector-rod tip and detent in the under-barrel lug. No wiggle at all. Crane and frame mating was tight. The cylinder rotated counter clockwise. What we liked about the 637-2 and the 856 was the ability to see the rear of the cylinder when it was locked in place in the frame. This let us know if the chambers had a cartridge — or empty case — in the chambers. With the Bodyguard 38, the shooter can't see from the rear if the chambers are filled.

The sights are fixed, and the ramp front sight is machined from the barrel. The ramp is serrated to cut glare. The rear sight is a milled groove in the top strap. It was not as deep as the groove in the other revolvers, and because the finish was matte silver, there was a bit of glare. But the sights were still serviceable.

The hammer spur was small but coarsely checkered, which gave us confidence when cocking the piece to fire it in SA mode. The outside exterior was nearly as snag free as the Bodyguard 38, except for the exposed hammer spur.

The textured rubber grip is excellent because it has a small footprint, so it is easier to concealed carry, yet it has palm swells that fill your hand. All shooters needed to curl their small fingers under the butt. It was comfortable.

We noted the cylinder gap was 0.007 inches, yet we did not see a great difference in velocity compared to the 856, which had a tight gap that measured 0.004 inches. The DA trigger pull was smooth, and there was a bit of stacking prior to the shot firing, which we felt was fine for the intended purpose of self defense. The SA trigger pull was a crisp 3.8 pounds, and that helped with accuracy testing.



The Taurus hammer, left, has a wide thumb pad that is coarsely checkered, allowing us to cock the revolver with confidence. At right is the 637-2's hammer, which was slightly narrower.

With Armscor 158-grain FMJs, one tester fired a 5-shot group that measured 1.0 inches, and with SIG Sauer +P ammo loaded with 125-grain JHPs, fired a best group of 0.7 inches. This revolver really performed well with all loads hovering around 1.5 inches on average. What we liked was the way the grip helped manage recoil. Though it was small, it felt hand-filling, so it moved less than the Bodyguard 38 in hand during recoil. This grip is smaller than the 856's grip, so it made the revolver slightly easier to conceal carry. We used a DeSantis leather Cozy Partner to carry the 637-2 and Bodyguard 38. It was very comfortable carrying either Smith.

Our Team Said: There is a reason the 637 is still being built — why fix what isn't broken? We feel the 637-2 offers the right combination of weight, power, and comfortable shooting. It is a proven deign that also incorporates a great grip, good sights, and a smooth DA trigger pull. It cost more, but it is worth it, in our opinion.

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

Which 308 Bolt-Action Rifles Would We Take to the Woods?

Tested: Ruger American Rifle Standard 6903, Savage Model 12FV 18393, Savage Axis II XP 57095, and Mossberg's Trophy Hunter. One is a Best Buy, but another is Our Pick.

The 308 Winchester is one of our more popular and most versatile cartridges. Accurate, powerful enough for most anything in North America save the largest bears, and affordable, the 308 Win. has a lot going for it. Among the most popular firearms chamberings for this cartridge is the bolt-action rifle, and we recently tested four examples to see which one might make a timely Christmas present for yourself or someone else who would like something long and skinny under the tree.

In some ways, this report was a continuation of the test we ran in the October 2017 issue, which used the Savage Axis, Remington SLP, Remington Varmint rifle, and Browning BAR, all in 308 Winchester. This time, we included a rifle that would be a match for the Remington Varmint rifle previously tested — the Savage Model 12 with bull barrel was the heaviest rifle this round. In the previous feature, the editor noted that none of the rifles seemed to excite the testers. He was correct. This time around was different. This time we got excited and found the rifles are interesting and appropriate to the job at hand. More specifically, the rifles were the:

- *Ruger American Rifle Standard 6903, $382;*
- *Savage Model 12FV 18393, $420*
- *Savage Axis II XP 57095, $411; and*
- *Mossberg Trophy Hunter, $240.*

We really liked one rifle and felt that it was a Best Buy and a great all-round choice. Also, a more-recent version of an existing model was well worth its modest price. Because we are always looking for a low-cost gem, we added a bargain-basement used gun whose specific model we hadn't previously tested in the magazine. The Mossberg Trophy Hunter rifle line (there is also a Savage Trophy Hunter, so don't be confused) has been replaced by the Mossberg Patriot series.

The Savage Model 12FV was the most accurate rifle in the test and received high marks for its smooth action and three-position safety. The only question was, would you be willing to lug this rifle around the woods or bring it to the stand? Those and other questions are answered below.









Top to bottom are four bolt rifles in 308 Winchester: the Savage Model 12FV 18393, $420; Ruger's American Rifle Standard 6903, $382; the Savage Axis II XP 57095, $411; and Mossberg's Trophy Hunter, $240. Three are excellent choices, our shooters said.

How We Tested

During the test we used four loads. The first was a handload consisting of the Hornady 168-grain A-Max bullet and Varget powder for 2600-fps average velocity among the rifles. Each rifle fired 20 of these in offhand fire at a steel target at 50 yards and then 10 more at 100 yards to test practical field accuracy. For firing from the

RANGE DATA

Fiocchi 150-gr. SST	Savage Axis	Savage Model 12	Ruger American	Mossberg Trophy Hunter
Average Velocity	2740 fps	2866 fps	2728 fps	2599 fps
Muzzle Energy	2500 ft.-lbs.	2735 ft.-lbs.	2478 ft.-lbs.	2249 ft.-lbs.
Small Group	1.4 in.	0.6 in.	0.9 in.	1.2 in.
Large Group	1.95 in.	1.2 in.	1.4 in.	2.0 in.
Average Group	1.7 in.	0.9 in.	1.2 in.	1.6 in.

Hornady Black 168-gr. A-Max	Savage Axis	Savage Model 12	Ruger American	Mossberg Trophy Hunter
Average Velocity	2645 fps	2790 fps	2655 fps	2590 fps
Muzzle Energy	2609 ft.-lbs.	2903 ft.-lbs.	2629 ft.-lbs.	2501 ft.-lbs.
Small Group	1.35 in.	0.65 in.	0.85 in.	1.40 in.
Large Group	2.10 in.	1.20 in.	1.60 in.	2.10 in.
Average Group	1.75 in.	0.95 in.	1.20 in.	1.80 in.

Black Hills 175-gr. Match	Savage Axis	Savage Model 12	Ruger American	Mossberg Trophy Hunter
Average Velocity	2603 fps	2812 fps	2566 fps	2616 fps
Muzzle Energy	2632 ft.-lbs.	3072 ft.-lbs.	2558 ft.-lbs.	2658 ft.-lbs.
Small Group	1.25 in.	0.75 in.	0.85 in.	1.75 in.
Large Group	2.1 in.	1.0 in.	1.5 in.	2.25 in.
Average Group	1.6 in	0.88 in.	1.2 in.	2.0 in.

To collect accuracy data, we fired three-shot groups off a benchrest. Distance: 100 yards. We recorded muzzle velocities with a Competition Electronics ProChrono Chronograph.

bench, we used the Hornady 168-grain Black round, Black Hills' 175-grain BTHP Match, and the Fiocchi 150-grain SST, providing a good mix of bullet weights.

Ruger American Rifle Standard 6903 308 Winchester, $382

This was the price for just the gun from BudsGunShop.com. It's also available as a package (16934) with a Vortex Crossfire II 3-9x40 Riflescope for $486 retail. As tested with a Leupold Vari-X II 3x9-50mm scope ($390 at OpticsPlanet.com), the total package comes to $772.

The Ruger American isn't a cut-down Ruger M77 or Hawkeye, but is instead its own design. The Ruger American features a free-floating barrel, adjustable trigger, and a well-designed stock. The stock features steel V-blocks that cradles the action and set screws that make it rigid. It is no secret the more expensive Ruger M77 sometimes required glass bedding and relieving the forend for best accuracy results. The Ruger American rifle is good to go as issued. We like the stock design, especially the comfortable and secure fit of the angled wrist of the synthetic stock. The bolt has three locking lugs. The bolt throw is 70 degrees. The bolt is tight, smooth, and operates well. The four-shot magazine is positive in operation and is easy to load and unload. The Ruger features a two-position sliding safety. Among the three less-expensive rifles, the Savage Axis II, Mossberg Trophy Hunter, and Ruger American, we found nothing to separate their functional quality. The Savage Model 12, we felt, featured a better safety system.



For bench testing, we used Black Hills' 175-grain BTHP Match, the Hornady 168-grain Black round, and Fiocchi's 150-grain SST, providing a good mix of bullet weights.

Fired offhand, the rifle has advantages. There are serrations near the front of the stock the Savage Axis does not have; however, some of the crew did not use these serrations in their firing style. In rapid offhand fire, the Ruger gave a good account of itself and rang the steel target on demand at 100 yards. All of the rifles had been sighted in for the handload in the initial work up session to fire 1 inch high at 100 yards. This enabled us to zone in on the center of the steel target and punish it. In accuracy firing from the bench, the rifle provided excellent results. The most accurate loading was the Black Hills Match, with a 0.85-inch three-shot group. Firing from the bench, we felt that recoil was not severe, but the Savage Axis has a better recoil pad. The Ruger trigger is crisp and clean. There were no failures to feed, chamber, fire, or eject.

Our Team Said: Our evaluation was primarily centered on hunting, but we also decided that if we needed a 308 rifle for area defense,

RUGER AMERICAN RIFLE STANDARD 6903 308 WINCHESTER, $382

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Ruger American is light enough, accurate enough, and inexpensive enough for us to want to keep it.



Action	Bolt, 3 lugs, 70-degree throw
Overall Length	42.5 in.
Barrel	22 in. long, blued steel; 6 grooves, 1:10 RH twist, free floated
Overall Height w/Scope	6.6 in.
Length of Pull	13.5 in.
Weight Unloaded	6.1 lbs.
Weight Scoped (empty)	7.13 lbs.
Weight Scoped (loaded)	7.15 lbs.
Capacity	3+1
Action	Blued steel
Magazine Type	Detachable Box
Stock	Black synthetic, integral bedding block system, grip serrations; sling swivel studs, soft rubber buttpad
Trigger Pull Weight	3.0 lbs. adjusted, Marksman Adjustable trigger
Safety	Tang
Sights	None, bases supplied
Warranty	None written
Telephone	(888) 220-1173
Website	Ruger.com
Made In	U.S.A.



Left: The Ruger is light enough and fit most shoulders and cheeks well. We like the stock and the rubber buttpad.



Right: Serrations around the wrist of the stock make for a good gripping surface. Below: Serrations on the forend aid in grasping the rifle.





Right: The 70-degree bolt throw is short and positive. The Ruger's bolt is smooth and stable in operation.



The box magazine is compact. It works well. The latch (bottom arrow) snaps into the magazine well (top arrow). Three of the four rifles have detachable magazines.

the Ruger American would be at the top of the list. A number of the raters compared the rifle to some pretty expensive rifles during the discussion and the comparison was favorable.

Savage Axis II XP 57095 308 Winchester, $411

We found the Axis II rifle for sale without a scope for $323 at several outlets, but we felt that the Bushnell scope was well worth the extra $88. The Savage Axis II is an improved version of the Axis we have previously tested. The stock differs from the Axis, and we liked the appearance and the fit and feel. The XP is a notation for this package gun, and the Axis II features the Savage AccuTrigger, which the original Axis did not have. The rifle is supplied with a Bushnell 3x9-40 scope. Sources tell us the scope may differ in some outlets.

The AccuTrigger created a sensation when released 16 years ago. The center lever blocks the sear unless pressed, and this allows a rifle with a lighter trigger to be

SAVAGE AXIS II XP 57095
308 WINCHESTER, $411
GUN TESTS GRADE: A- (BEST BUY)

This rifle neatly solves a lot of problems. You do not have to purchase a rifle then select a scope and sight the rifle in. Purchase the rifle with a bore-sighted scope, and you will be on the paper at 100 yards, with little final adjustment to be made. The Axis II was reliable and cannot be faulted on any major count. It works well, it is accurate enough for hunting to well past 100 yards, and it is affordable. With the new stock design and AccuTrigger, the rifle is superior to the original Axis rifle and is a solid Best Buy.



Action	Bolt
Overall Length	43.9 in.
Barrel	22 in. long, black carbon steel; 1-10 twist; Sporter taper
Overall Height w/Scope	7.0 in.
Length of Pull	13.3 in.
Weight Unloaded	6.5 lbs.
Weight Scoped (empty)	8.2 lbs.
Weight Scoped (loaded)	8.4 lbs.
Capacity	3+1
Action	Matte-black carbon steel
Magazine Type	Detachable Box
Stock	Black synthetic sporter
Trigger Pull Weight	3.0 lbs. adjusted, AccuTrigger
Warranty	1 year
Telephone	(413) 568-7001
Website	SavageArms.com
Made In	U.S.A.



A two-position safety is part of the Savage Axis II design that we liked.



We have tested several Savage Axis rifles with steady, reliable results for an economy rifle. The Axis is a critical winner. A new stock design is a considerable improvement over the older Axis rifle stock.



Right: The Savage Axis bolt is smooth enough in operation and does not bind. When fired quickly, the Savage Axis performs well.



Cheek weld is good, and the Axis II fits the shoulder well. While it isn't expensive, the Bushnell scope works fine.



The Axis II features a steel magazines that seems the most robust of the test.

deployed with a greater degree of safety. All four rifles tested feature a variation on the trigger lever/adjustable rifle trigger. The stock uses steel pillar bedding, once an expensive custom modification. The stock is supplied with sling studs. All the raters commented favorably on the recoil pad, which was rated the best of the test. The Savage was the most comfortable of the three standard-size rifles off the bench rest, which has something to do with the stock as well as the recoil pad. The rifle is relatively light at 6.5 pounds. The stock treatment is good, with a thin wrist, which allows rapid handling. The safety is tang mounted. All the raters liked the tang-mounted safety, which was basically the same type on all four rifles tested. The safety was crisp and positive in operation.

Firing offhand at the steel gong target, we found the Savage Axis rifle in the running with the Ruger and superior to the Mossberg Trophy Hunter. The bolt throw

SAVAGE MODEL 12FV 18393
308 WINCHESTER, $420
GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The Savage Model 12 is the most accurate rifle tested. Fired from the bench, recoil was modest, and the rifle never failed to impress us. It was not such a joy to lug back and forth to the 100-yard line, which we did with each rifle to see how weight impacts the shooter. Firing several three-shot groups and trudging to the berm and back was a part of the test that favored lighter rifles. The LOP is slightly longer than the other rifles, but we felt the advantage of the recoil pad made it worthwhile.



Action	Bolt
Overall Length	46.25 in.
Barrel	26 in. long; matte-black carbon steel; 1:10 twist
Overall Height w/Scope	7.1 in.
Length of Pull	13.6 in.
Weight Unloaded	9.8 lbs.
Weight Scoped (empty)	11.1 lbs.
Weight Scoped (loaded)	11.4 lbs.
Capacity	4+1
Action Finish	Matte-black steel
Magazine Type	Blind box
Stock	Black synthetic
Trigger Pull Weight	3.0 lbs. adjusted, AccuTrigger
Warranty	1 year
Telephone	(413) 568-7001
Website	SavageArms.com
Made In	U.S.A.







Above: The nagging feed problem seemed to lessen as we used the Model 12. Right: The bolt of the Savage Model 12 was not tight in operation, but it was rigid as far as accuracy goes. The enlarged handle made for easy bolt operation.



A blind magazine (right arrow) is part of the Savage 12's design. A wide forend (left arrow) made for comfortable benchrest shooting, below.



Left: As spent cases piled up we found the Savage Model 12 comfortable to fire and use. A combination of a superb adjustable trigger and good glass resulted in excellent accuracy potential. A side test was firing the rifles with proven handloads. All fed well and gave good results.

feels different from the Ruger's, but it is quite smooth and fast in operation. Most of the raters felt that a fast follow-up shot was quicker with the Ruger. Firing offhand, the Savage Axis II was accurate and gave the 100-yard gong a beating. It is the lightest rifle tested and gave good results in quickly tracking targets.

In this test, we found only a slight advantage in the more expensive Leupold scope. The Bushnell scope mounted on the Savage Axis II worked fine for every shooting chore. When firing off the benchrest, the Savage Axis II was not as accurate as the Savage Model 12, which was expected. The Savage Axis II was more accurate than the Mossberg Trophy Hunter, but not as accurate as the Ruger American. The best group was with the Black Hills Ammunition 175-grain Match load, with a 1.25-inch effort at 100 yards. The rifle never gave any type of function problem.

Our Team Said: The XP rifle-and-scope combination proved to be a good one, and the Bushnell scope is adequate for the chores it will be called upon to perform in the field. Though the rifle was in third place for accuracy behind the Ruger American and Savage Model 12, we feel that the Savage Axis II XP package is the Best Buy of the test.

Savage Model 12FV 18393 308 Winchester, $420

This was our price from Cabelas. Fitted with a Nikon Buckmaster 3x9-40 scope, $150 from Brownells.com, brought the test total to $570. This is the most expensive rifle tested, but not the most expensive combination tested when mounted with the Nikon Buckmaster rifle scope. At $420, we feel the Savage Model 12 is a solid deal and a valuable rifle. The 26-inch-long bull barrel makes for a very stable rifle with good attributes. As it turned out, the rifle is also very accurate. The barrel is free floated, and the fit of the stock to the action is excellent. While the obvious difference between the Savage Model 12FV and the other rifles is weight and barrel length, we also wanted to thoroughly compare the actions, triggers, and safety systems. The Model 12 action is very smooth and appears strong. The addition of an enlarged bolt knob aided in fast handling and manipulation. Bolt operation is very smooth with a fast uplift and rapid action. The bolt is rigid and does not wobble. We also liked the Savage Model 12's three-position safety. This safety enables the shooter to lock the bolt on Safe, to have the rifle on Safe but still work the bolt, and to move the safety to the Fire position. This safety marks the Model 12 as an upscale rifle compared to the other rifles tested. Still, the tariff wasn't very high for a superior rifle.

We chose the Nikon Buckmaster rifle scope to top the Savage Model 12. There are more expensive scopes we might recommend for use at 200 yards or more, but the Nikon provided all we needed for this test. During the test, the two identical Bushnell scopes went against a Leupold and this Nikon. The Bushnell products served without complaint and were easy to properly zero. The



These are the first two rounds fired at 100 yards to sight in the Savage Model 12. A bit of adjustment and we were good to go.

Savage Axis II XP came bore sighted from the factory and needed no further adjustment when used with 168-grain loads. The Nikon Buckmaster is a widely distributed and affordable rifle scope. It provided good results on the firing line. We cannot say that one rifle scope gave an advantage over the other in this test, in which almost all of the ammunition was expended at 100 yards. We agreed that the Leupold had the best glass clarity, but because of its price, it should have.

The Savage AccuTrigger was set at a crisp 3 pounds before heading to the rifle range. The Model 12FV stock widens slightly ahead of the magazine. This widened section makes for excellent handling in offhand and prone fire. When firing offhand using the proper technique, bladed to the target, the rifle provided excellent results — the best of the test in addressing the steel gong at 100 yards. The rifle is heavy, however, and some raters tired more quickly than others when firing offhand with it. Just the same, at least for the first 20 cartridges, the rifle is comfortable to fire offhand. Felt recoil was the least of any rifle tested because of the weight. We sometimes slung the rifle over our shoulder and walked to the 100-yard line during the test. The Savage Model 12 was more of a drag on the shoulder than the other rifles. You will have to decide if the Savage Model 12 and its weight suits your personal style.

Fired off the bench, the Savage Model 12 gave excellent results. The smallest group of the test program was a 0.65-inch 100-yard three-shot group with the Hornady Black load and its 168-grain A-Max bullet. The Black Hills Ammunition 175-grain Match load slammed into 0.75 inches. The Fiocchi 155-grain SST, a hunting load, delivered a 1.0-inch 100-yard three-shot group. The rifle was very accurate, easily the most accurate rifle tested. It should be with its purpose-designed stock and bull barrel, but all heavy-barrel rifles are not as accurate as this one. We ran across a single problem with the Savage Model 12, the only feed issue with any of the rifles. The Savage Model 12FV in 308 Winchester features an integral magazine that holds four cartridges. When all four cartridges were loaded, the rifle sometimes misfed the first cartridge up. This happened about half the time, and occurred with all three loads. The first cartridge would stop feeding and have to be led by the finger into the chamber. When only three cartridges were loaded, there were no feed issues. With a gun that shoots like

MOSSBERG TROPHY HUNTER
308 WINCHESTER, $240
GUN TESTS GRADE: C

The rifle is reliable and operates smoothly enough for the price, if not as smoothly as the other rifles tested. Overall, the rifle was worth the modest price, but there are better choices. The Bushnell scope gave excellent performance for the price. While the Bushnell scope isn't expensive, it offers parallax adjustment. Checkering was okay, but the fit of the stock was only fair. This stock was fatter than the synthetic rifle stocks.



Action	Bolt
Overall Length	44.0 in.
Barrel	22 in. long; blued steel, 1:10 twist
Overall Height w/Scope	7.2 in.
Length of Pull	13.5 in.
Weight Unloaded	7.0 lbs.
Weight Scoped (empty)	8.7 lbs.
Weight Scoped (loaded)	8.9 lbs.
Capacity	3+1
Action Finish	Blued steel
Magazine Type	Detachable box
Stock	Black synthetic
Trigger Pull Weight	3.0 lbs. adjusted
Warranty	1 year
Telephone	(203) 230-5300
Website	Mossberg.com
Made in	U.S.A.

this one, we can't see the owner sending the rifle back to the maker. More likely, he would prefer to deploy a four-shooter (3+1) instead of a five-shooter. We otherwise found no defect in performance or reliability.

Our Team Said: The Savage Model 12FV is easily the most comfortable rifle to fire from the bench and was the most accurate. The weight of the rifle may be a drawback, but then it is a varmint-weight rifle intended to set on a hill and shoot varmints at long range. As an all-round hunting rifle, it doesn't come up short on accuracy, handling, and comfort.

Mossberg Trophy Hunter 308 Winchester, $240

We found this rifle languishing on the rack at a pawn shop. The owner told us that in this day of $400 guns that come with factory-outfitted optics and accurate modern rifles, used rifles must be cheap in order to sell. (Unless they are a pre-'64 Winchester or a solid Remington 700 in a popular caliber.) This rifle showed little signs of use. The stock wasn't particularly attractive, most likely birch, with checkering around the pistol grip and forend. The scope was a Bushnell Banner Dusk to Dawn model. Unlike the common 3x9-40mm, this is a 4x12-40mm. The scope was perhaps originally offered in a combination. Today, it costs $111 at OpticsPlanet.com.

The stock is okay but angular. You really have to want a wood stock to choose this one over an ATR with the standard synthetic stock. The barrel is stamped "TROPHY HUNTER." A similar rifle, the ATR with wood stock, is offered at RKguns.com for $330, but that rifle is not supplied with a scope. So, our set up was a good deal as the rifle was practically spotless. We have been asked why we test used guns, and the fact is we pass on badly used or abused firearms. But a clean catch such as this one is worth testing and educating the reader as to what is available in used department. If used smartly and not abused, such guns can be as good as new.

The rifle featured sling attachments and a 22-inch barrel. The Trophy Hunter tips the scales at almost exactly 8 pounds with the scope mounted. The trigger wasn't difficult to set for the even 3-pound break we tried to give every rifle tested. The trigger is no easier nor more difficult to set than the other rifles. The detachable box magazine holds four cartridges. It isn't difficult to remove and seems sturdy once in place. It did not rattle. The stock's forend was too angular. Some of our colleagues with larger hands found no problem with the forend. The stock was ideal for fit into the shoulder.

Our Team Said: The Mossberg Trophy Hunter wasn't a bad rifle, but we see now why Mossberg replaced it. The rifle's bolt was smooth enough, equal to the Axis, perhaps not the Model 12, and slightly less smooth than the Ruger. We do feel that the bolt of the Mossberg had more wobble and loose motion as it was worked. There were no feed issues. Fired offhand, the rifle proved steady. The wobble in the bolt slowed the shooters down compared to the other rifles. We wished we had a thicker recoil pad. The Mossberg was the least accurate rifle tested.

When the smoke had cleared, we had several good choices. One of the raters remarked that the Savage Model 12 had delivered sub-minute-of-angle accuracy with the Black Hills 175-grain load while delivering more than three thousand pounds of energy. The weight of the Savage Model 12 is a drawback, but then it is a "varmint" gun.

The Savage Axis package gun is easily the Best Buy, and while the average accuracy wasn't as impressive as the 12FV, the Axis is well suited to taking medium game out to 200 yards.

The Ruger American, however, would be Our Pick with a bit of shopping for the proper scope. For hunting a 200-pound animal at 200 yards all are fine, with the Savage Model 12 stretching the range somewhat.

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

2018 Guns & Gear Top Picks

Which pistols, revolvers, rifles, shotguns, accessories, and ammunition were the picks of our testers in the past year? We look back at the previous 12 months to highlight the winners.

Toward the end of each year, I survey the work R.K. Campbell, Roger Eckstine, Austin Miller, Robert Sadowski, David Tannahill, Tracey Taylor, John Taylor, and Ralph Winingham have done in GUN TESTS, with an eye toward selecting guns, accessories, and ammunition the magazine's testers have endorsed. From these evaluations I pick the best from a full year's worth of tests and distill recommendations for readers, who often use them as shopping guides. These choices are a mixture of our original tests and other information I've compiled during the year. After we roll high-rated test products into long-term testing, I keep tabs on how those guns do, and if the firearms and accessories continue performing well, then I have confidence including them in this wrap-up. — *Todd Woodard*















BEST IN CLASS REVOLVER '18

Ruger GP100
KGP-141
38 Special +P
357 Magnum





BEST IN CLASS PISTOL '18

SIG Sauer
P226 Nitron
E26R-9-BSS
9mm Luger
SIG Sauer
Caliber X-Change
Kit 357 SIG







BEST IN CLASS RIFLE '18

Ruger American Rifle Ranch 300 Blackout







BEST IN CLASS SHOTGUN '18

Mossberg 590 Tactical Heat Shield
Synthetic 50665 12 Gauge



SIG SAUER P226 NITRON NO. E26R-9-BSS 9MM LUGER, $1087
SIG SAUER CALIBER X-CHANGE KIT 357 SIG, $370
GUN TESTS GRADE: A (357 SIG), A (9MM)
BEST-IN-CLASS PISTOL

There is a reason the P226 is an iconic pistol. Although pricey, the separate slide assembly ensures point of aim with each cartridge. This is Our Pick.



Action	Locked Breech, DA/SA, Semi-Auto
Overall Length	7.7 in.
Overall Height	5.5 in.
Maximum Width	1.5 in.
Weight Unloaded	34.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	40.0 oz.
Barrel	5.0 in.
Capacity	15+1 (9mm), 12+1 (357 SIG)
Slide	Nitron-finished stainless steel
Frame	Nitron-finished alloy
Frame Front Strap Height	2.5 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.3 in.
Grips	Textured polymer
Grip Thickness (max)	1.3 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	5.6 in.
Sights	SIGLite night sights 3-dot, fixed front and rear
Trigger Pull Weight (DA)	9.1 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight (SA)	4.9 lbs.
Trigger Span (DA)	2.9 in.
Trigger Span (SA)	2.6 in.
Slide-Retraction Effort	17 lbs. (9mm), 19 lbs. (357 SIG)
Magazines	2; steel, double stack
Safety	Decocking lever
Warranty	Lifetime
Made In	U.S.A.
Website	SIGSauer.com



The SIG P226 and Caliber X-Change kit efficiently changed the P226 in 9mm to 357 SIG. Since the Caliber X-Change kit comes with a slide, the sights can be zeroed for each caliber. SIG color-codes the recoil spring to the caliber.

RUGER GP100 KGP-141 38 SPECIAL +P/357 MAGNUM, $500
GUN TESTS GRADE: A
BEST-IN-CLASS REVOLVER

The stainless-steel GP100 is an excellent performer in all categories: accuracy, smoothness, control, and velocity. It is a big gun, which is comfortable to fire, so the size is a tradeoff. Rock-solid lock up was also an advantage. The double-action press was smooth, and the single-action press was crisp as well. The GP100 was even more controllable with the 38 Special, and the piece was very accurate. The Federal 140-grain load provided one 1-inch 25-yard group in the stainless GP100.



Action	Double-action revolver
Overall Length	9.5 in.
Overall Height	6.1 in.
Minimum Width	1.56 in.
Weight Unloaded	38.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	40.0 oz.
Barrel	4.0 in. long, stainless steel
Cylinder Capacity	6
Frame	Stainless steel
Front Strap Height	2.5 in.
Back Strap Height	4.5 in.
Grips	Hogue black rubber
Grip Thickness	1.2 in.
Grip Circumference	4.8 in.
Front Sight	Post
Rear Sight	Adjustable
Sight Radius	5.5 in.
Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	4.1 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	14.0 lbs.
Trigger Span Single Action	2.5 in.
Trigger Span Double Action	2.8 in.
Warranty	None
Telephone	(336) 949-5200
Website	Ruger.com
Made In	U.S.A.
State Approved	CA, MA



The cylinder release differs from the Taurus and the Smith & Wesson designs. The shooter pushes the Ruger button inward with a positive release. We also liked the blued version.

RUGER AMERICAN RIFLE RANCH 06968 300 BLACKOUT, $420

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-
BEST-IN-CLASS RIFLE

This Ranch Rifle is a good, lightweight solution for coyotes or deer, and it shot well both suppressed and unsuppressed. Its short length would make it handy, even with a big can on it.



Action	Bolt; machined-steel hexagonal receiver
Length, Overall (in.)	36.0
Height, Unboxed (in.)	6.75
Height, As Tested (in.)	9.0
Width, Maximum (in.)	2.6
Weight, Unboxed (lbs.)	6.2
Weight, Range (lbs.)	7.5
Barrel Length/Twist (in.)	16.12; 1:7 RH; 6 grooves
Barrel Finish/Material	Matte-blue carbon steel; cold hammer forged
Barrel Muzzle Diameter (in.)	0.748, 5/8-24 thread;
Stock	Power Bedding integral block
Stock Length of Pull (in.)	14.0
Stock Grip Cap	Black plastic; Ruger logo
Trigger-Pull Weight (lbs.)	3.2; Marksman adjustable
Trigger Style	Single stage
Trigger Guard Material	FDE polymer
Safety	2-pos. tang-mounted slider button
Magazine	(1) 5-rd. detachable box
Bolt	3 lug; stainless steel; plunger ejector;
Sights	None
Optics Mounting Hardware	1-piece aluminum rail
Warranty	None written
Telephone	(336) 949-5200
Website	Ruger.com
Made In	Mayodan, NC



Here's a peek at the Ruger's threads. This was the thinnest-contour barrel in the test, with a diameter of 0.748 inch. Below: The rifle's barreled action sits on a pair of V-notch supports that bed the action.



MOSSBERG 590 TACTICAL SHOTGUN HEAT SHIELD SPEEDFEED SYNTHETIC 50665 12 GAUGE, $480

GUN TESTS GRADE: A
BEST-IN-CLASS SHOTGUN

The action is smooth, tight, and reliable. Feeding was very smooth. The heavy 20-inch barrel provided excellent recoil control. The magazine capacity is sufficient, and with the SpeedFeed stock, the Mossberg had sufficient on-board capacity. No malfunctions.



Action Type	Manual pump action; 3-in. chamber
Overall Length	41.0 in.
Overall Height	3.6 in.
Capacity (2.75 in.)	8+1
Weight Unloaded	7.25 lbs.
Weight Loaded	8.0 lbs.
Receiver	Dual extractors; twin action bars; drilled & tapped
Barrel	20.0 in. long; matte-blued heavy-wall steel; heat shield
Choke	Cylinder bore
Buttstock	Black synthetic SpeedFeed stock, 4-shell capacity
Buttstock Length of Pull	13.9 in.
Buttstock Drop @ Comb	1.5 in.
Buttstock Drop @ Heel	2.125 in.
Forend	Black-ribbed synthetic
Sights	Front bead
Trigger Pull Weight	6.0 lbs.
Safety	Ambi tang mounted sliding button
Warranty	2 years
Telephone	(800) 363-3555
Website	Mossberg.com
Made In	U.S.A.



The Mossberg Tactical's barrel attachment is rugged. No other shotgun had this feature.



The standard ribbed forend gave plenty of leverage. This is a heavy-barrel shotgun with an extended magazine and a heat shield.

LIPSEY'S GLOCK 17RTF2 VICKERS FDE 9MM LUGER, $630

GUN TESTS GRADE: A- (OUR PICK)

This is as nice a Glock as we have handled. The pistol demonstrates the typical Glock 9mm reliability and handles much like any other Glock 17. Advantages include the Vickers Tactical sights, the magazine guide, and magazine base pads, which added to the pistol's fast handling.



Action	Safe Action, Glock 17 Series
Overall Length	8.03 in.
Overall Height	5.1 in.
Maximum Width	1.4 in.
Weight Unloaded	25.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	32.2 oz.
Barrel Length	4.48 in.
Barrel	Steel
Magazine	(2) 17-rd. detachable box
Slide	Steel; Flat Dark Earth Cerakote finish
Frame	Glock RTF2 Polymer; Flat Dark Earth Cerakote finish
Frame Front Strap Height	2.5 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.5 in.
Grips	NA
Grip Thickness (max)	1.2 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	6.2 in.
Front Sight	Wilson Combat Vickers Elite Battle, green tritium AmeriGlo post
Rear Sight	Wilson Combat Vickers Elite Battle, U-notch rear
Trigger Pull Weight	5.5 lbs.
Trigger Span Single Action	2.7 in.
Safety	None
Slide-Racking Force	10.6 lbs.
Warranty	1 year
Website	Lipseys.com (FFLs only)
Telephone	(225) 755-1333

The special run of Lipsey's Glock 17 Vickers Tactical pistols are great for combat. Lipsey's is a Baton Rouge, Louisiana-based distributor, not a retailer, which ordered a special run of Glock 17s and Glock 19s from the manufacturer. To buy this pistol, you'll need to ask an FFL to order it. Previous runs have sold out.



COONAN CLASSIC 1911 100000-005 357 MAGNUM, $1560

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

At a $1200 counter price, this used Coonan provided the best accuracy and the greatest energy of the handguns tested. It was reliable, provided we used the proper loading technique. The Coonan is a large and well-made handgun. Although based on the 1911, the Coonan is unique. The slide-lock lever, slide-lock safety, and grip safety are typical 1911 treatments.



Action	Locked Breech, SA/DA, Semi-Auto
Overall Length	8.3 in.
Overall Height	5.6 in.
Maximum Width	1.3 in.
Weight Unloaded	42.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	48.0 oz.
Capacity	7+1 (single stack)
Barrel	5.0 in. long; 4340 carbon steel, chrome plated; linkless
Slide	Brushed 17-4 PH stainless steel
Frame	Brushed 17-4 PH stainless steel
Frame Front Strap Height	2.9 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.5 in.
Grips	Black walnut, smooth
Grip Thickness (max)	1.3 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	5.75 in.
Sights	Fixed, 3-dot
Slide-Retraction Effort	19.0 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight SA	4.0 lbs.
Trigger Span Single Action	2.9 in.
Magazines	2; steel
Safety	Thumb
Warranty	Lifetime
Made In	USA
Website	CoonanInc.com
State Restrictions	CA, MA



Slide-to-barrel and bushing fit are excellent. This made for good accuracy. A bold front-post sight also helped. The controls were big and well fitted.



SMITH & WESSON M&P 380 SHIELD EZ
180023 380 ACP, $384
GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Shield is a good choice for home defense for those who cannot handle a caliber larger than the 380 ACP. As a carry gun, it isn't smaller than some 9mm Luger handguns, but it is much easier to fire well. The barrel length at 3.65 inches afforded the highest velocity and energy.



Action ..... Single action; internal hammer fired
Weight Unloaded ..... 18.5 oz.
Weight Loaded ..... 21.0 oz.
Overall Length ..... 6.7 in.
Barrel ..... 3.675 in. long; stainless steel; ..... Armornite finish.
Overall Height ..... 4.85 in.
Magazines ..... (2) 8-round detachable boxes
Front Strap Height ..... 2.15 in.
Back Strap Height ..... 2.95 in.
Maximum Width ..... 1.0 in.
Grip Thickness (Max.) ..... 1.0 in.
Grip Circumference (Max.) ..... 5.1 in.
Slide ..... Armornite-finished stainless steel; ..... 9.5 lbs. racking effort
Frame ..... Black polymer; ..... 3-slot rail; 18-degree grip angle
Grip Material ..... Textured black polymer
Trigger Pull (Single Action) ..... 4.75 lbs.; ..... tactile & audible reset
Trigger Span (Single Action) ..... 2.6 in.
Safety ..... Grip
Front Sight ..... Fixed post, white dot
Rear Sight ..... Windage adj.; white dot
Warranty ..... Limited lifetime
Website ..... Smith-Wesson.com
Telephone ..... (800) 331-0852
Made In ..... Springfield, MA



The Shield field-strips easily into the major components of slide, frame, and magazine. The Shield EZ requires only 9 pounds of effort to rack the slide. The S&W was capable of mounting a combat light on its three-slot accessory rail.



METRO ARMS CO. MAC 1911 BOBCUT M19BC45C 45 ACP, $746
GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Bobcut offers a crisp trigger pull and bobbed grip for better concealment. The red fiber-optic front sight and front and rear grip serrations push it past other Commanders. The MAC's bobbed rear grip strap did not reduce the pistol's effectiveness.



Action Type ..... Short recoil-operated, ... locked breech, single action
Overall Length ..... 7.8 in.
Overall Height ..... 5.4 in.
Maximum Width ..... 1.25 in.
Weight Unloaded ..... 34.5 oz.
Weight Loaded ..... 39 oz.
Slide Material ..... Forged steel
Slide-Retraction Effort ..... 21.0 lbs.
Receiver Material ..... Cast steel
Finish ..... Hard chrome
Front Strap Height ..... 2.6 in., textured
Rear Strap Height ..... 2.4 in., textured
Barrel Length ..... 4.25 in.
Pistol Grip ..... Textured hardwood
Grip Thickness (max) ..... 1.25 in.
Grip Circumference (max) ..... 5.37 in.
Magazine ..... (1) 8-round steel
Rear Sight ..... Steel, Novak-type white two dot, ... drift adj.
Front Sight ..... Steel, red fiber optic, drift adj.
Sight Radius ..... 5.75 in.
Trigger Pull Weight ..... 4.6 lbs.
Trigger Span ..... 2.8 in.
Safety ..... Manual ambi. thumb, grip safety
Warranty ..... 1 year
Telephone ..... (732) 493-0302
Website ..... MACpistols.EagleImportsInc.com
Made In ..... Philippines



The rear grip strap reduces the MAC from printing under garments. We'd conceal carry the MAC with a flush-fit magazine to further reduce the chance of printing. The front grip strap on the MAC was stippled and offered great adhesion.

TAURUS TRACKER 44TRACKER4SS 2-440049TKR
44 SPECIAL/44 MAGNUM, $449
GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

The Tracker is a formidable revolver. It proved reliable and should be useful as a personal-defense revolver for the home or in carry with 44 Special loads. For defense against wild animals, the 44 Magnum loads are a good choice. The Tracker's ribber grips and barrel ports make for good recoil control. Overall, we felt that the Tracker gave us our money's worth.



Action	Double Action/Single Action
Overall Length	8.8 in.
Overall Height	5.5 in.
Maximum Width	1.56 in.
Weight Unloaded	33.8 oz.
Weight Loaded	35.6 oz.
Barrel	4 in. long, matte stainless steel
	1:18.75 RH twist w/5 grooves; 8 ports
Capacity	5
Frame	Compact stainless steel
Front Strap Height	2.5 in.
Back Strap Height	4.0 in.
Grips	Ribber rubber
Grip Thickness	1.2 in.
Grip Circumference	5.5 in.
Front Sight	Day Glo red insert, fixed
Rear Sight	Adj. for windage, elevation
Sight Radius	5.5 in.
Trigger Pull Weight Single Action	6.5 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight Double Action	15 lbs.
Trigger Span Single Action	2.75 in.
Trigger Span Double Action	3.5 in.
Safety	Taurus Security System; transfer bar
Warranty	Lifetime
Telephone	(800) 327-3776
Website	TaurusUSA.com
Made In	Brazil



Note the Ribber grips. These were the best grips of the test, our raters said. You have to work to control the Tracker revolver. Left: The rear sight was adjustable for windage and elevation.



RUGER LCRX MODEL 5460 357 MAGNUM, $669
GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The LCRx had decent accuracy and made concealed carry uncomplicated. It transmitted a lot of recoil to the shooter's hand. We'd like a more user-friendly front sight. The aluminum alloy frame is lightweight, and, in our opinion, this gave it an edge. The barrel is a stainless-steel insert. We found the LCRx slightly more tolerable in recoil with 357 magnum ammunition.



Action Type	Double action/single action
Overall Length	6.5 in.
Barrel	1.87 in. long, matte-black steel
Sight Radius	4.0 in.
Overall Height	4.5 in.
Maximum Width	1.27 in.
Weight Unloaded	17.1 oz.
Weight Loaded	17.9 oz.
Cylinder Gap	0.007 in.
Capacity	5
Frame	Matte black polymer
Cylinder	Matte black steel
Frame Front Strap Height	1.75 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	2.7 in.
Grip	Hogue Tamer,
	textured rubber w/finger grooves
Grip Thickness (max)	1.23 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	5.1 in.
Front Sight	Pinned ramp, white insert blade
Rear Sight	Fixed frame notch
Trigger Pull Weight (DA)	9.5 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight (SA)	5.9 lbs.
Trigger Span (DA)	2.7 in.
Trigger Span (SA)	2.2 in.
Safety	Transfer bar
Warranty	None written
Telephone	(928) 541-8892
Website	Ruger.com
Made In	U.S.A.





Above: There is plenty of hammer spur to cock the revolver safely, yet most of it is enclosed. Note the transfer bar (arrow). There is ample room inside the LCRx trigger guard for gloved hands.

SMITH & WESSON MODEL 317-3 KIT GUN 22 LR, $759

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The 317-3 Kit Gun had a good trigger and grip size. We thought the front sight was easy to see and was fine for informal plinking, but not for more-detailed precision shooting. We really appreciated the light weight of the 317-3. It was easy to tote and easily slips in a back pocket. When shooting in DA mode, we noticed the heavy 15-pound trigger pull was not that user friendly.



Action Type	Revolver
Trigger Type	DA/SA
Overall Length	7.2 in.
Barrel Length	3.0 in.
Sight Radius	4.1 in.
Overall Height	5.2 in.
Maximum Width	1.3 in.
Weight Unloaded	11.7 oz.
Weight Loaded	16.5 oz.
Cylinder Gap	0.008 in.
Capacity	8
Frame Finish	Matte silver
Barrel/Cylinder Finish	Matte silver
Frame Front Strap Height	2.2 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.7 in.
Grip	Textured finger groove rubber
Grip Thickness (max)	1.1 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	4.5 in.
Front Sight	Ramped pinned, green fiber optic
Rear Sight	Adj. V-notch
Trigger Pull Weight (DA)	15 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight (SA)	3.2 lbs.
Trigger Span (DA)	3.4 in.
Trigger Span (SA)	2.9 in.
Safety	Hammer block
Warranty	None written
Telephone	(800) 331-0852
Website	Smith-Wesson.com
Made In	U.S.A.



This petite J-frame had a nice grip that made the 317-3 feel substantial without being bulky. S&W did a lot to reduce the weight in the 317-3, such as a groove in the trigger guard.

CIMARRON BAD BOY MODEL CA360-BAD BOY 44 MAGNUM, $687

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Bad Boy offers a classic single action with a modern twist by using a Colt 1860 Army-style grip and octagonal barrel. The Bad Boy is built on a pre-war frame with an 1860 Army-style grip that is longer and thinner than a traditional single action. There is a lot to like about the Bad Boy, including its accuracy, light weight, and manageable recoil. The longer grip made shooting 44 Magnum rounds pleasant. If we were trekking in bear country, we wouldn't mind carrying the Bad Boy due to its light weight. The blued finish was well executed, and there were not sharp edges on the trigger guard. The trigger was skinny like a traditional single action. The trigger broke at just under 3 pounds.



Action Type	Single, hammer cocked
Overall Length	13.75 in.
Barrel Length	8.0 in.
Sight Radius	9.5 in.
Overall Height	5.5 in.
Maximum Width	1.6 in.
Weight Unloaded	2.75 lbs.
Weight Loaded	2.97 lbs.
Cylinder Gap	0.005 in.
Capacity	5
Frame Finish	Blue
Barrel/Cylinder Finish	Blue
Frame Front Strap Height	2.37 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	4.5 in.
Grip	Smooth wood
Grip Thickness (max)	1.45 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	5.0 in.
Front Sight	Ramped blade
Rear Sight	Adj. rear
Trigger Pull Weight (SA)	3.0 lbs.
Safety	none
Warranty	5-year limited
Telephone	(800) 264-4962
Website	Cimarron-Firearms.com
Made In	Italy



The Cimarron's front sight was serrated and screwed and dovetailed into the octagonal barrel. This echoed the treatment on the BFR and was vastly superior to the EAA's fixed front blade.

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. The Taylor's has a short-stroke lever that requires much less forward travel. The Model '73 rifles use a brass cartridge carrier that transports a cartridge from the magazine tube to the chamber. A semi-buckhorn rear sight is the standard on these lever-action rifles We liked the front-blade sight due to the brass bead.



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
Stock/Forend	Oiled satin finish walnut, checkered
Stock LOP	13.0 in.
Stock Buttpad	Steel, crescent shape, leather butt cover
Trigger Pull Weight	2.4 lbs.
Trigger Style	Single stage
Safety	Lever pin
Magazine	10-round tube
Sights	Adj. buckhorn rear, gold bead front
Warranty	1 year
Telephone	(540) 722-2017
Website	TaylorsFirearms.com
Made In	Italy





Above: 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. Inset: The Comanchero featured a leather-wrapped loop.

SAVAGE 110 BA STEALTH 22639 300 WINCHESTER MAGNUM, $1122

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

The 110 BA Stealth does not have all the bells and whistles, but it is a precision rifle worth having. The lower cost compared to similar rifles can get you into long-range shooting affordably.



Action Type	Bolt, push feed
Overall Length	49.0 in.
Height Unboxed	8.0 in.
Height As Tested	11.25 in.
Width	3.25 in.
Weight, Unboxed	11.1 lbs.
Weight, Loaded	12.8 lbs.
Weight, Range	13.25 lbs.
Barrel	24 in. long; fluted; 1:9.3 RH twist, matte-black carbon steel
Barrel Muzzle Device	3-port brake
Stock	Drake Hunter/Stalker aluminum chassis, Magpul PRS polymer buttstock;
Stock, Length of Pull	Adj., 14.3 to 15.7 in.
Stock Comb	Straight, adj. for height
Forend	Aluminum, slotted M-LOK handguard
Stock Sling Attachments	Two fixed
Trigger Pull	2.1 lbs. factory set; adjustable single stage
Trigger Guard	Aluminum, enlarged
Safety	2-position slider, tang mounted
Magazine	(1) 5-round. detachable single-stack box, steel
Magazine Release	Paddle, front of trigger guard
Bolt	Two lugs, 90-degree lift
Bolt Release	Bolt switch and trigger pull
Sights	None, Drake Picatinny rail
Accuracy Guarantee	None
Warranty	1-year limited
Telephone	(800) 370-0708
Website	SavageArms.com
Made In	U.S.A.



The Magpul PRS Gen 3 stock is excellent, being adjustable for LOP and comb height. An aluminum chassis allows attachments of AR-style accessories such as buttstocks and pistol grips. The Magpul stock and Hogue pistol grip as provided are pretty good choices, however.

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY SAINT CALIFORNIA COMPLIANT W/FREE-FLOAT HANDGUARD ST916556BFFHCA, 5.56 NATO, $1135

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Saint CA Compliant with free-float handguard is a great way to go legal in 50 states. The M16/AR-15 was originally a fixed-stock rifle. The ambi safety makes the best of the necessary stock configuration. A superior muzzle brake was a nice surprise.



Action Type	Semi-automatic, Direct impingement
Overall Length (Min./Max.)	35.0 in./36.2 in.
Overall Height w/o Scope	7.2 in.
Weight Unloaded	7.1 lbs.
Weight Loaded	7.8 lbs.
Upper Receiver	Forged 7075-T6 aluminum
Lower Receiver	Forged 7075-T6 aluminum
Barrel Length/Twist	16.0 in., 1:8 in.
Muzzle Device	Muzzle brake
Buttstock	Survival Systems Option Zero
Length of Pull (Min./Max.)	13.0 in./14.2 in.
Handguard	12.5 in. M-Lok free float
Magazine	Detachable
Rear Sight	Flip up, dual aperture
Front Sight	Flip up
Sight Radius	17.0 in.
Trigger	7.8 lbs., single stage
Safety	Ambidextrous lever
Cartridge Case Deflector	Yes
Dust Cover	Hinged
Forward Assist	Yes
Warranty	Limited lifetime
Telephone	(800) 680-6866
Website	Springfield-Armory.com
Made In	USA



The Option Zero combination stock and handgrip also included a secondary well for a spare magazine. The release was located just rearward. As per state compliance regulations, the stock was not immediately adjustable but could be lengthened by adding spacers. Multiple-length bolts should have been supplied.

BENELLI MONTEFELTRO NO. 10865 20 GAUGE, $1000

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (OUR PICK)

This is a well-made, fast-handling shotgun. Its light weight makes it easy to carry in the field, and if the shooter matches shotshells to the light weight, she can find comfortable, well-performing hits on practically any target. Yes, the 3-inch magnum punched hard, but physics being what they are, a slim shotgun will kick more. But with a properly fit stock, that negative can be eased as well.



Action	Semi-auto Inertia Driven
Chamber Length	3 in.
Overall Length	47.5 in.
Barrel	26.0 in., gloss-blued steel
Receiver	Matte-anodized-black aluminum alloy; grooved topstrap
Bolt-Retraction Effort	5.5 lbs.
Ventilated Rib	0.281 in. wide; grooved
Sights	Red-bar front, silver bead middle
Choke Tubes	IC, Mod, F (Crio)
Magazine Type	Tubular
Magazine Capacity (Plugged)	2
Magazine Capacity (Unplugged)	4
Weight Unloaded	5.8 lbs.
Weight Loaded (3)	6.1 lbs.
Weight Loaded (5)	6.25 lbs.
Buttstock	Satin-finish walnut, checkering
Buttstock Length of Pull	14.4 in.
Buttstock Drop @ Comb	1.5 in., adj.
Buttstock Drop @ Heel	2.25 in., adj.
Buttstock Pitch	4.0 in., adj.
Buttstock Cast (Off)	0.1875 in., adj.
Buttpad	Rubber, 0.5 inch thick
Forend	1.57 in. thick, checkered walnut
Trigger Pull Weight	6.0 lbs.
Warranty	5-year limited
Telephone	(800) 264-4962
Website	BenelliUSA.com





Above: The Benelli Inertia Driven system rotated the bolt in and out of the barrel lugs. Our female testers appreciated how their hands fit in the groove in the top of the slim forend. Benelli provided three-screw-in flush-fitting tubes and a wrench with the shotgun.

Programmable Automatic Powder Dispensers: Pick RCBS

Our reloading pursuits for handguns are generally to provide volume ammunition for training at a discount based on reusable cases and bullets purchased in bulk. The progressive reloading press is capable of producing more rounds per hour than our arms can withstand. But setting the powder drop to exact quantities can be trial and error, a time-consuming exercise of repeated drops to prime the new setting and weigh out the result. But what if the new load is not what you hoped? Using a programmable automatic powder dispenser enables the reloader to quickly develop multiple loads for test without having to reset your powder measure.

Automatic powder dispensers that drop a preset amount of smokeless powder have been around for a while. The powder charge is routed from its silo into a pan seated atop a scale. When the scale reads the desired preset weight, the stream of powder is shut off. The time saved is obvious but what about accuracy? Can the most fastidious reloader rely on an automatic powder dispenser to drop powder charges with the same accuracy as the common practice of using a manual powder drop to dispense a charge just a grain or two short of the desired load, then making up the rest of the charge by using a "trickler?" A trickler is a small tankard of powder across the top of which there is a pipe with a threaded interior. The center of the pipe has a pickup hole where it crosses through the powder. As the pipe is turned, granules of powder follow the thread to its end, where it tumbles one piece at a time into a pan seated atop a scale. Programmable automatic powder dispensers feed granules of powder through a threaded trickler pipe that rotates quickly until it gets close to the desired load, then slows to a ticking movement until the target weight is reached. We wanted to know if automation would save time and still maintain accuracy.

RCBS Chargemaster Lite No. 98940, $300

The RCBS Chargemaster Lite sounds as though it should be a small machine, but this was a full-sized unit with 2000-grain capacity and able to dispense up to 300 grains of smokeless powder at a time. Special features included a quick-drain spout, independently adjustable feet at all four corners to take advantage of the built-in bubble level, and an LCD touch-screen display. The Go button and the on/off buttons located at either side of the unit body were not touch-screen features.

We found that the quick-drain feature was just that. Featuring a larger opening than the Hornady and smoother operation, rotating the drain spout one-half turn dumped powder from the silo quickly. But we still had to follow up with brushing out the interior, and the clear plastic silo needed to be wiped out. All three manufacturers recommend not leaving powder in the machine. The longer you leave the powder in place, the more susceptible it becomes to static cling.

Loading the Chargemaster Lite with Winchester Super Target, we



The accuracy of the $300 RCBS Chargemaster Lite No. 98940 was hard to beat.

punched in 4.8 grains. Over the course of ten tries, a comparison between readings on the RCBS scale and the Dillon scale told us that the two units agreed completely 7 out of 10 times. Three times the Dillon scale read only 4.7 grains, but given each unit is rated for accuracy at +/- 0.10, the RCBS was in spec.

Setting the RCBS to dispense 40.2 grains of Reloder 17 powder, we were rewarded 10 out of 10 times with quantities of powder that weighed the same when checked on our Dillon scale, with no overages.

Our Team Said: The RCBS Chargemaster Lite proved to be an accurate, well-thought-out machine that did what it was supposed to. That is, it makes higher-volume powder delivery more convenient for the operator. The touch screen was responsive without being overly sensitive, and the information was clearly illustrated. Clean up was easy, and the specially configured fill tube kept things clean.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

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Top-Ranked Dry-Fire Trainers

Dry-fire training should be part of every shooter's training routine. It helps build the fundamentals of shooting and reinforces muscle memory. Enter technology, which offers a variety of high-tech lasers, laser-friendly targets, and apps that allows shooters to train in the comfort of their own homes, without the cost of going to a range and, further, without incurring the cost of ammo. The beauty of dry-fire training is you can do it any where you want and at any time. No loud noises, just the clicking of tripped firing pins and a flash of red laser, though some apps and target do have sound effects. Here are the best-ranked products we evaluated in the October 2018 issue:



Laser Ammo SureStrike Premium Kit 9mm, $150

What sets this laser cartridge apart from the others is that you can buy optional caliber adapters, so the 9mm laser cartridge can be configured to train with 40 S&W, 45 ACP, and 357 SIG ($12.94); 5.56 NATO, 7.62 NATO, and 300 Win. Mag. ($39.95); and 12 and 20 gauge ($39.95) shotgun adapters. Inserting the cartridge was similar to the other laser cartridges, and the shooter could use just the cartridge or install the pipe extensions and add the safety cap. We found that field-stripping the pistol to remove the cartridge and attached pipe was the best way to disassemble the set up. The SureStrike performed well and worked with every press of the trigger.

Our Team Said: Though the most expensive, the SureStrike offered better construction and an added level of safety with the threaded pipe extensions and safety cap.

GUN TEST GRADE: A

Laser Ammo LaserPET, $120

The Laser Personal Electronic Target (PET) is a standalone laser training target that is used in combination with the SureStrike laser cartridge or any other laser cartridges. It worked with the LaserLyte and CheapShot, too. The PET is about the size of a smart phone and is made of plastic. It comes with a stand so you can set it up on a flat surface, and it has a hole in the back to hang it on a wall, and it can be attached to a tripod. We found that we needed to aim precisely with the LaserPET to score a hit. The target cards decrease the size of the laser window. We used the LaserPET to practice our draw from concealment by setting it on the Shot Time mode, and we could see our time decrease from 2.01 seconds to 1.62 seconds over the course of one training session. The Magazine Change/Burst Shooting gives you 5 seconds to make a magazine change and hit the target or hit the target as many times as possible in 5 seconds. With the Beretta, SIG, and Arex, we could use the double-action triggers, but with the striker-fire pistols, it was a time suck to reset the trigger every time.

Our Team Said: The LaserPET helps you record hits and times, and this makes the training more valuable because you can chart your progress. This allows you to train in ways you cannot at a public range.

GUN TEST GRADE: A

iTarget, Target Sled and Laser Bullet Package, $89
iTarget Quick Draw, $5

The iTarget works with both Apple and Android devices. It comes with a plastic base that holds the smart phone in front of the target. You need to download the free app to your phone and make sure your phone's camera has permission to use the app. We had issues until we realized we needed to go into our phone settings to give the app permission. The system uses the iTarget app, the camera in your smart phone to view a target, and a laser cartridge. The camera of your smart phone captures the laser hits on the target and saves them to the phone. The first step is to fit the target area into the phone's screen, then specify the bullseye area using the phone's screen. This second step tells the app the area

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685). 1. Title of Publication: Gun Tests. 2. Publication No.: 0004-1340. 3. Filing Date: 9/21/18. 4. Issue Frequency: Monthly. 5. No. of Issues Published Annually: 12. 6. Annual Subscription Price: $49.00. 7. Known Office of Publication: 111 Corporate Dr., Big Sandy, TX 75755-2446. Contact person: Tom Canfield, 203-857-3139. 8. Headquarters or General Business Office of the Publisher: Same as above. 9. Publisher: Timothy H. Cole. Editor: W. Todd Woodard. Managing Editor: N/A, AG Media, Inc., 111 Corporate Dr., Big Sandy, TX 75755-2446. 10. Owner: AG Media, Inc., 111 Corporate Dr., Big Sandy, TX 75755-2446. 11. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amounts of bonds, mortgages or other securities: None. 13. Title: Gun Tests. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: August 2018. 15. Extent and Nature of Circulation (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months/ No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): a. Total No. of Copies Printed (51,958/51,100) b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 1. Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541 (51,204/50,848). 2. Paid In-County Subscriptions (0/0). 3. Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution (132/118). 4. Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS (0/0). c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (51,335/50,996). d. Free Distribution by Mail: 2. Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541. 1. In-County as Stated on Form 3541 (0/0). 3. Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS (0/0). 4. Free Distribution Outside the Mail (128/129). e. Total Free Distribution (130/130). f. Total Distribution (51,465/51,096). g. Copies not Distributed (493/4). h. Total (51,958/51,100). j. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (99.7%/99.7%). 17. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. Tom Canfield, VP, Circulation, 8/24/18.

— *continued from page 31*

to be scored. Then the shooter sets the distance he will be shooting from. As the laser hits the target, a subtle gunshot sound is made and a hole appears on the phone screen. The shooter can track his progress by saving the target image to the phone, or you can share it with your friends for bragging rights.

Our Team Said: We liked that this system provided a holder for your smart phone, which makes using these apps easier. We also liked the ability to save targets and refer to them after multiple training sessions to see our scores.

GUN TEST GRADE: A

Mantis Tech Mantis X, $150

The Mantis X trainer (MantisX.com) is quite different compared to the other trainers. It can provide immediate feedback on each shot you take, whether dry-fire or live fire. It uses a sensor that attaches to the Picatinny-style rail of any pistol or rifle. If your firearm doesn't have a rail, an optional barrel mount or floor plate attachment is available ($14 to $25). For revolvers, the floor plate attachment can be attached to the revolver's butt. The sensor uses a built-in battery and is charged via a USB cable. Battery life is about 8 to 10 hours. It is made in the U.S. and has a two-year warranty. The sensor comes in a zippered hard case along with a USB charging cable.

Our Team Said: We used the Mantis in live- and dry-fire training, and we felt this trainer provided the best data collection, plus it offered recommendations on how to correct bad shots.

GUN TEST GRADE: A

COMING UP IN GUN TESTS

- Service Gun Shoot-out: Four 9mm Handguns Go Head to Head. We test the Beretta APX Compact, Glock 45, Beretta 92FS, and SIG's P320 M17 to see which of these service pistols is the best choice for civilian shooters for concealed carry and personal defense.

- Testing Plastic and Kydex Holsters. We tested a box full of holsters and find some very good gear, some that doesn't suit most of us, and a few surprises. Tested: Q Series, JM Custom Kydex AIWB, Keepers Errand, CYA.

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