GUN TESTS®

THE CONSUMER RESOURCE FOR THE SERIOUS SHOOTER

$5.95 September 2019/Vol. XXXI, No. 9



SMALL 40 S&W SHOOT-OUT

We tested four new 40 S&W subcompact handguns: Springfield XD-S 3.3-inch, Smith & Wesson M&P Shield, Kahr's CW 40, and the Taurus G2C, along with a used SIG Sauer P224 SAS 224-40-SAS2B. Which one was the clear winner? Check it out on... ● Page 6

10MM AND 40 S&W VALUE GUIDE: PAGE 18



SHOTGUNS WITH BLING

No, you don't 'need' the copperhead scales of the Iver Johnson, the lustrous finish of the Mossberg Retrograde, or the minimalist stainless-and-black appearance of the RIA M5. But they are fun.
● Page 19

SELF-DEFENSE SHOTGUNS VALUE GUIDE: PAGE 26



LEFT-HAND HOLSTERS

Southpaw shooters are in luck if you've been looking for a suitable carry solution for your handgun. We test units from Hunter Co., Quest, Uncle Mike's, Swap Rig Holsters, Jason Winnie, Barber Leather Works, Blackhawk, 1791 Gun Leather, and others. ● Page 27

DOWNRANGE: 2 ● FIRING LINE: 3 ● CUSTOMER SERVICE: 31 ● COMING UP: 32

DOWNRANGE

SO MANY GOOD GUNS



Todd Woodard

As you know, GUN TESTS is different from other firearms-aficionado magazines because we test and recommend products that sometimes don't do so well. It is rare to see other gun magazines show stoppages, misplaced groups, faulty manufacturing, and other quality aspects that turn those writers off enough to say, "Don't buy this one."

But I believe real-life owners of guns — purchasers — usually tell more truth about product performance in the comments sections of various retailers. I assiduously read such comments, looking for online complaints that are worth checking out when I buy our guns and shoot them head to head. If we can't duplicate an issue that has come up, we don't report it — it's just gossip if we can't document it ourselves. But, occasionally, a nugget will drop out of the online compost, making the experience worthwhile.

It was in one of these deep dives that I realized an unmistakable trend had surfaced: A lot of folks were really happy with their purchases, and our own independent reporting was showing a lot of As. Guns are a lot better now than even 10 years ago, across the board.

● Example: Ruger and Savage, to name but two companies, have created suspension systems in their rifle stocks that improve accuracy by insulating the barrels from pressures created by the stocks. In a bygone age, that required a gunsmith or handy shooter to free-float barrels and put in pillars.

● Elsewhere, drop-in aftermarket triggers are becoming standard equipment. I have admitted in these pages that I am a trigger snob, a taste that has been formed over hundreds of thousands of smallbore rifle rounds and dry firing. Now, many rifles come with really good triggers as standard equipment, or as options you can order direct from the factory. I will not be surprised when handgun makers start using Apex or other triggers as standard equipment.

● Further, technology in shotgun stocks now allow the user to adjust fit, a crucial part of being able to hit moving targets. Likewise, in handguns, replaceable backstraps make fitting a handgun to the shooter possible, even easy.

At GUN TESTS, we actually enjoy guns, and it is getting ever easier to find rifles, shotguns, and handguns that many people will like and shoot well. Even low-cost products, such as the Iver Johnson PAS 12 gauge in this issue, or the Springfield Armory 40 S&W handgun reviewed on page 6, offer refinements that force other makers to adopt the upgrades to keep up. That moves the window, and shooters who love to buy and shoot firearms are the beneficiaries. **GT**

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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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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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The Value of Ankle Med Kits

Reader field-tests the Rescue Essentials kit on the job for years and has some thoughts on its usefulness and drawbacks. Reader GW points out that some states have outlawed self-defense coverage.

Re "Tested: Ankle-Worn Medical Kits from Galco and Rescue E," July 2019

I've worn the Rescue Essentials medical ankle holster for at least 6 to 7 years on duty, in uniform. No issues at all with retention in all environments. My duty boot keeps it from slipping down, and my calf keeps it from riding up. No need for a calf-retention strap like some gun ankle holsters with the boots on. I find it a great option to carry most of the needed equipment in an inconspicuous location.

The contents have changed over time. Now, I keep extra Nar-Can in there as well (being held close to the body, it keeps the spray from freezing in winter). I've found the CAT-T to be too bulky, and, instead, carry one on my duty belt in a specifically designed holster. The SWAT-T in this holster is much flatter and can serve as a pressure-bandage wrap, tie a door shut/open, or a million other things. With the molle, I'm able to clip on a blunt-tip knife. An additional benefit to this kit is that with everything secure, I can take it off and toss to someone in a hot zone.

I built my own kit rather than the pre-packaged one. This is not a "carry everything" med kit; it won't accept a CAT-T or chest seals. Being next to your ankle, it gets exposed to some heat/cold, sweat, etc. But it is excellent for duty or off-duty wear as well. I encourage all my officers to explore this option, as a bulky IFAK on a duty belt just doesn't work, and only so much can fit in a flat packet in a side cargo uniform pocket.

One issue I have had is that it does tend to catch/pull on the inside of the pants. I've tried to cover the exposed "hook" side, but it still seems to catch. It's not a big



deal with uniform pants because the kit is higher up, but in a suit it might ruin the material if not addressed. Likewise, it can print pretty easily and appear to be a ankle (gun) holster unless the pant material is not thin and not slim fitting. Fine under jeans, regular cargo pants, and so on, but it does print through thin suit material.

Despite that, I try to wear this anytime I'm carrying a firearm — just makes sense. Especially as a police officer, if I have to discharge a firearm, I'm legally required to render aid if possible. I do not want to risk not having the proper equipment available when an ankle holster such as this makes it very practical to do. **— Crush**

Seeing how many of today's great law-enforcement officers and emergency responders are starting to wear trauma kits, it would have been nice for the article to have addressed:

- Can a garter belt, worn just below the knee, be attached to the kit so that one could adjust the height of the kit?

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.

● How the ankle trauma kit would ride if one needs to run and/or after getting into a struggle/fight, as so many police officers will face during a shift.

● Also, can the kit be worn higher above the ankle so when one sits it doesn't expose the kit for everyone to see?— **fxdwg_98**

Re "Buying Self-Defense Insurance: Important Factors to Consider," @ Gun-Tests.com

I highly recommend the Armed Citizens Legal Defense Network (www.armedcitizensnetwork.org). It is not conventional insurance, but it will actually be worth more if you are actually arrested. An insurance policy always has limits and conditions, but with ACLDN, you will be in control of selecting your representation. Massad Ayoob is a director. Check them out at their website.

— Jefferson's Regulator

If, as the writer [Michele Byington] suggests, juries may consider anyone — even if he or she carries legally — as someone who wants to hurt or kill someone else, perhaps the juries don't understand that the burden of proof lies with the prosecutor. The accused is innocent until proven guilty, not the other way around. So, it is incumbent upon the judge and the defense attorney to impress that fact upon the jury, perhaps again and again. It shouldn't matter (although it does) how the jury feels about someone who carries a gun for self-defense; the only thing that matters is what the prosecution can prove.

Having said (all) that, I have to agree with others who have stated that it would be nice if GUN TESTS could rate the different insurance plans for us. Even though GUN TESTS readers are intelligent and well-read, that doesn't mean that we understand "legalese."**—Crash**

Many states (such as Washington, where I live) have pretty much outlawed these insurance plans. I had NRA Carry-Guard here, but now that is gone, and I am not sure if there are any others licensed to provide this service here. **— GW**

There is a good comparison chart of plans on the Concealed Carry website. There is, also, a short video that is selling a DVD course comparing various plans. The chart seemed sufficient to me, but thought I should mention that there was a sales pitch attached. You can use the chart without getting the DVD. **—McGeezer**

I have heard the requests for GUN TESTS *to compare the various self-defense plans out there, and I haven't come up with a suitable way to get that done because the legal terms are so specific, and so local, and so variable (such as coverages being outlawed in the anti-gun-rights states) that I've shied away from it. And the recent troubles at NRA are a big part of that. Because NRA's internecine battles are not over, I worry about Carry Guard's viability.*

— Todd Woodard

Re "Don't Buy Glock Full-Auto Switches," August 2019

You believed something published by CNN?

— Mitchrapp3356

No, normally not. But a stopped clock (analog) is right twice a day. — tw

Who would buy one? Obviously about 2900+ someones who must be able to spend hundreds of dollars on ammo to spray all over their private range. No public range would allow it. But because Glock made a model that is full auto, some people gotta have it — legal, illegal, they don't care. And you would be surprised at who those people are!

— Fatboy46

Maybe this is a way to promote Darwinism among gang members. BATFE will follow the paper trail. Kick a few doors in. If you buy one of these full-auto Glock parts, chances are you are too stupid to own a handgun anyway.

— x211sam

I trust you, not CNN. I know that any semi-auto can be modified to full auto, some with just a file. Will CNN support stiff sentences for those possessing a modified Glock?

— Leon

I wouldn't change a thing on my Glocks. They are perfect the way they came. Glock Perfection!

— Vin

Why would anyone install a Chinese part into such a fine piece of machinery as a Glock in the first place? I am marking today's date, and I will check back in a year from now to see exactly how many Glock Machine Gun Pistol Shootings have occurred in the U.S. **— Treborsh**

Oh, no. ATF fearmongering about something that is a nothingburger. I have no interest in a machine pistol, regular pistols are fine for me. The pro criminals who are technically minded enough to do this kind of mod are few and far between. If there's a sudden uptick in Glock 18 machine pistol shootings, I'll eat my words, but this is garbage. But yeah, don't buy one. **— Joe**

Re "We Test Inside-The-Waistband Holsters for $50 and More," February 2019

I carried nothing but leather for years. However, I found myself needing an IWB holster in my four-season climate. As mentioned in your article, flexibility is the primary requirement for me. Like many others, I gave the Kydex material a try because it supposedly didn't have the issues we leather-carriers griped about for years. You know, absorbing liquid after a 14-hour day on our sides and the effect the guns' oils had on our hides and

clothes and the effect sweat has on our guns' finishes. It all sounds great until we discover what they didn't say. Like the advanced rate of wear and tear on our weapons' finish. The way Kydex cracks under rough handling or repeated use, making a Kydex holster's lifespan less than half the lifespan of quality gun leather. The Wright Leather Works Cobra, noted in your article, is exactly what I'm looking for, but was having trouble finding. Thanks for this article that covered an ever-widening selection of products. Reading your article has saved me a good deal of money and at least another layer of duds in the "not quite good enough" used-holster box in my work room. **— Stahley**

Re "Best Reloading Scales: Programmable Automatic Powder Dispensers Compete," June 2018

I have been reloading since I was 19 and now I'm 77. RCBS products are some of the best. I have the RCBS Chargemaster and use it almost daily. It is the best I have ever used, and at one time or the other, I have had most of the products available. **— Texasbil**

What is the point of using one of these scales if you're going to drop short charges and trickle up? You can do the same thing with a much cheaper mechanical powder measure, a scale, and a trickler.

— Bnystrom

I have the Hornady scale. The overage problem you observed is very powder dependent. H4895, a long-stick powder, generated consistent overages. It did much better with N165. I believe that the overage problem is caused by clumping of the powder in the drop tube. I was able to mitigate the problem by inserting a short length of soda straw (now banned in California) into the tube, then cut a notch out of the side that sticks into machine to allow powder to enter the straw. This reduces the feed rate and for me resulted in far fewer overages. The Hornady unit is easy to clean. Also, wipe the interior with a dryer fabric softener tissue to reduce static cling on the sides of the hopper.

— Friar Tuck

Thanks for sharing those ideas. Say hello to Robin for me. — tw

Re Springfield 911 9mm

I just received my first copy of Gun Tests. I really enjoyed the review of the Glock 48 and the new Mossberg. I was wondering if you folks are going to test the new Springfield 911 in 9mm? I'm very interested in buying that pistol. I'm a retired peace officer. **— Mario**

Yes, we've got a 911 9mm in the works. — tw

Re "The 5 Best 380 ACP Pistols" @ Gun-Tests.com

I am truly glad the imaginary Baby Rock is #1 on the list of 380 ACP–chambered handguns. Having looked high and low for one since 2016, I myself would have named the Starfleet phaser a better weapon of choice, since neither one exists. **— May5183**

Go through the Armscor website at armscor.com/firearms/bbr-series/baby-rock-380/ and click the "Buy U.S. Now" button. Also, I did a web search that included the model number and got quite a few hits. BudsGunShop.com, which we cite regularly, has them in stock for $355. — tw

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There are two ways to find guns we've reviewed. The Compare Guns feature (top left corner of the page under the logo) allows you to input several descriptors and narrow the search results. Or you can use the Search function. If you search for a common item, such as "22 LR," you'll get tons of references. Basically, the search function finds every instance of the searched-for topic and lists the accompanying articles the topic appeared in. The more specific and unique the reference, the better the search. We do our best to list the catalog numbers for guns we've tested, so that's usually a good place to start. There's also an "Advanced Search" area to help you narrow the results.

We welcome mail from our readers. To send us comments or questions about previous articles in the magazine, email us at: **GunTestsEditor@icloud.com.** *If you'll include the month and year of the article you're writing about, it's a big help. Also, please include your name, address, and phone number. We won't publish your personal information other than your first name, but we may need to contact you about material in your letter.* **GT**

40 S&W Compacts: Taurus, Kahr, S&W, Springfield, & SIG

This chambering has the rap of putting sharp recoil into the hand of the shooter, a problem accentuated when fired from a small-profile handgun. So, naturally, we tested six smaller 40s to check it out.

Despite a noticeable drop in popularity and sales, the 40 S&W handgun is far from being a dead issue. Quite a few shooters realize that the 40 is just the bridge between the 45 and 9mm that it was meant to be. The 40 hits hard and enjoys an excellent reputation in police service. Wound ballistics are excellent. The 40 may be shoehorned into a 9mm-size frame. The single downside seems to be increased recoil over the 9mm and a loss in capacity that amounts to a cartridge or two compared to the 9mm. Let's look at some of the options in a carry gun in this caliber. We chose subcompact handguns for review, with an emphasis on concealed carry, which would emphasize both the recoil and capacity drawbacks. After a thorough test, we found five good handguns, including one we like the best.

Why the 40 S&W?

At present, the 9mm is everyone's cartridge and the round enjoys all-time-high sales. The 40 is being replaced in some police circles. Cynics may say they have seen this many times, and after good cops die due to inadequate calibers, the race will be back on to replace the 9mm. This is simply history and perhaps even physics. The 40 S&W has turned in excellent results, not only against felons and motivated attackers but against dangerous animals as well. It isn't as well known, but the 40 S&W has proven effective not only in putting down animals that were struck by vehicles but also dangerous animals up to and including bears. Interestingly, the five 40 S&W handguns in this report are similar to identical in size to their 9mm siblings. They offer the same action and sights. While they may recoil more than your 9mm, they also hit harder. Physics again.

We tested the following four new 40 S&W subcompact handguns:

- *Springfield XD-S 3.3-inch XDS93340BE, $378;*
- *Smith & Wesson M&P Shield 180020, $337;*
- *Kahr CW 40 CW4043, $301;*
- *Taurus G2C 1-G2C4031-10, $250.*

Then, we included a used *SIG Sauer P224 SAS 224-40-SAS2B, $550*, for reasons we detail below. While all five handguns were reliable and accurate enough, as well as easy enough to manage, one landed at the top of the heap.



Top to bottom are the Taurus G2C, the Smith & Wesson Shield, and the Springfield XD-S 3.3". The XD-S has a lot going for it, our shooters said.

40 S&W RANGE DATA

Black Hills Factory New 155-grain JHP	SIG Sauer P224 SAS	Kahr CW40	S&W Shield	Springfield Armory XD-S 3.3"	Taurus G2C
Average Velocity	1140 fps	1101 fps	1020 fps	1060 fps	1080 fps
Muzzle Energy	447 ft.-lbs.	417 ft.-lbs.	358 ft.-lbs.	387 ft.-lbs.	401 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.3 in.	2.4 in.	2.3 in.	2.0 in.	2.4 in.
Average Group	1.5 in.	3.0 in.	2.8 in.	2.5 in.	3.0 in.
Hornady Critical Defense 165-grain FTX	**SIG Sauer P224 SAS**	**Kahr CW40**	**S&W Shield**	**Springfield Armory XD-S 3.3"**	**Taurus G2C**
Average Velocity	966 fps	942 fps	955 fps	943 fps	951 fps
Muzzle Energy	342 ft.-lbs.	325 ft.-lbs.	334 ft.-lbs.	326 ft.-lbs.	331 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.1 in.	2.0 in.	2.8 in.	2.0 in.	2.3 in.
Average Group	1.5 in.	3.0 in.	3.0 in.	2.6 in.	2.8 in.
Remington Ultimate Defense 180-grain JHP	**SIG Sauer P224 SAS**	**Kahr CW40**	**S&W Shield**	**Springfield Armory XD-S 3.3"**	**Taurus G2C**
Average Velocity	980 fps	944 fps	960 fps	930 fps	957 fps
Muzzle Energy	384 ft.-lbs.	356 ft.-lbs.	368 ft.-lbs.	346 ft.-lbs.	366 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.8 in.	2.5 in.	2.5 in.	2.2 in.	2.1 in.
Average Group	2.2 in.	3.0 in.	2.9 in.	2.6 in.	2.8 in.

All groups were fired at 15 yards from a braced benchrest position using a Bullshooters pistol rest. The chronograph was 10 feet from the muzzle. We used a Competition Electronics Pro Chrony to measure velocity. ***Ammo sources:*** *Black Hills 155-grain JHP ($17.89/20 rounds at TargetSportsUSA.com); Hornady Critical Defense 165-grain Flex Tip 91340 ($16.19/20 from SportsmansGuide.com; Remington Ultimate Defense Compact Handgun CHD40SWBN 180-grain Golden Saber ($15/25 at TargetSportsUSA.com).*

How We Tested

We used three types of ammunition during the firing course. These were the Remington UMC 180-grain FMJ loads, Hornady's 165-grain FTX Critical Defense rounds, and SIG Sauer 180-grain FMJs. In testing for accuracy off the bench, we used the Black Hills Ammunition 155-grain JHPs, Remington 180-grain Golden Sabers, and Hornady 180-grain XTPs (see further ammunition details in the Range Data sidebar). This provided a wide range of brands to gauge reliability and accuracy. We fired 80 rounds in each handgun during the range/combat firing session, using 30 rounds of each type of FMJ ammunition and 20 rounds of the Hornady FTX load. We fired three five-shot groups with each brand of JHP loads, for a total of 45 additional rounds in each handgun.

SIG Sauer P224 SAS 224-40-SAS2B 40 S&W, $550 (used)

An advantage of the 40 S&W in the 2019 market is that the 40s are much less popular in used-gun sales than 9mms. Dealers will be willing to discount a gun that doesn't move quickly. They pay less for a used 40 S&W and allow less on trade-ins. This allows a savvy shooter to find a great deal on a used P224 40 S&W, as we did here. If you want to buy new, Cabelas was offering 40 S&W P224 SAS pistols for $1070 in July 2019. But our used test gun was only $550. While it is still at least $170 more expensive than any of the others, it has a better feature set for the discriminating shooter.

The SAS is a smooth treatment of the SIG P series. The SIG Anti Snag treatment is simply a means of removing sharp edges from the slide. This results in a much smoother gun for concealed carry, one less likely to snag on clothing or the shooter's skin. This pistol is a short version of the SIG P229, just as the P229 is a short P226.

The SIG P224 features the SIG smooth-out package and exhibits few sharp edges. The top of the front sight is a little sharp; the front of the slide is nicely beveled. Even the rounded trigger guard is smooth. The sights are well designed and easy to use well in fast, accurate fire and in firing for accuracy.

The controls are easy to use well. The handy frame-mounted decocker is superior to slide-mounted levers. It is easily manipulated. Simply press the lever downward and the hammer is lowered to a safe position. The magazine release is tight and operates in a positive manner. The magazines are steel.

The slide on the SAS is Nitron-finished steel over an aluminum receiver. The P224 incorporates the frame rails into the SIG steel locking insert rather than machined into the aluminum frame. This makes

SIG SAUER P224 SAS 224-40-SAS2B 40 S&W, $800

GUN TESTS GRADE: B

The P224 is a compact pistol with a short barrel and grip, yet excellent accuracy. The results would have been very good for a service pistol and not out of sync with many target guns we have tested. The short grip takes some getting used to. For the person willing to master its demands, this is a formidable handgun with good control, excellent accuracy, and fine reliability.



Action Type	DA/SA Double-action first shot
Overall Length	6.7 in.
Overall Height	4.5 in.
Maximum Width	1.3 in.
Weight Unloaded	25.4 oz.
Weight Loaded	29.2 oz.
Slide Material	Nitron-finished steel
Slide Retraction Effort	16.0 lbs.
Frame	Anodized aluminum alloy
Front Strap Height (w/o mag)	1.5 in.
Back Strap Height	3.0 in.
Barrel	3.5 in. long, steel, 6 grooves, 1:16 RH twist
Grips	Hard plastic, pebbled
Grip Thickness (Maximum)	1.25 in.
Grip Circumference	5.6 in.
Magazines	Two 10-round detachable boxes
Rear Sight	Dovetailed SIGLite night site, drift adj.
Front Sight	Dovetailed SIGLite night site, drift adj.
Sight Radius	5.16 in.
Trigger Pull Weight DA	13.1 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight SA	4.2 lbs.
Trigger Span DA	2.6 in.
Trigger Span SA	2.4 in.
Safeties	No manual safety, firing pin lock
Warranty	Lifetime
Telephone	(603) 610-3000
Website	SIG-Sauer.com
Made In	Exeter, NH



The SIG P224 SAS was controllable, with a good bit of effort. The short handle and the powder payload of the 40 S&W can make small handguns hard to shoot; training is the solution.



While the SIG is accurate, groups suffered when double-action first shots were included. The 13.1-pound pull weight can disturb the sights.

for a durable and long-lived set up.

The frame is nicely anodized. The front of the frame dust cover is rounded to avoid snags and allow ease of holstering. The magazine release is tight and positive in operation. The plastic grips feature a nicely pebbled surface that allows excellent abrasion and adhesion. The rear strap is more finely pebbled than the front. Two 10-round magazines are supplied. They feature a basepad that allows good control and easy magazine insertion. The pads do not affect concealment due to the grip design. The SIG P-series double-action trigger breaks at 15 pounds, according to a Lyman electronic trigger-pull gauge. The single-action trigger breaks cleanly at 4.25 pounds. The SIG pistol has a slower single-action trigger reset than some pistols. This may limit its use in competition, but it matters less in personal defense. During the test, we also used longer 13-shot SIG P229 40 S&W magazines. They functioned fine.

The primary distinguishing feature of the P224 is its short grip. This grip is shorter in frontstrap dimension that any of the single-column-magazine pistol grips, but it is thicker side to side, which accounts for the staggered round count in the magazine and resulting +3 rounds of capacity. However, this grip proved to be the limiting factor for most raters in handling the P224. Just the same, the SIG P224 gave good results on the firing course, but much depended on the skill



The SIG's takedown is easy enough. Most shooters would be able to do this quickly at the range.

SIG's three-dot night sights are the only night sights in the test. The availability of working night sights is a reason to consider a higher-priced used firearm with more features.





Here's a more detailed look at the SIG's sights. As long as the lamps are still glowing, they offer better performance in the dark.

Right: While compact in frame size, the P224 retains a 10-round magazine. That's more capacity than all single-stack full-size 1911s and about the same as staggered stacks.





This is a group with the SIG P224 fired single action. Groups are half the size of those fired double action.



Arrow: The P224 features the SIG frame-mounted decocker.

of the rater with the particular action type.

Firing the SIG on the combat course, the raters learned that absolute attention to detail is important. The firing grip must be solid, and the double-action trigger must be pressed straight to the rear, consistently. The short grip demands that the shooter take as high a hold as possible. In this firing course, the level of experience of the individual shooters was the predictor of performance. Some did well, some did not. The handgun was fired at 5, 7, and 10 yards during the combat course. Once the shooters got past the double-action first-shot trigger, results were good on the combat-style targets. One of the raters wrapped his support hand around the firing hand and moved his support hand forefinger forward of the trigger guard, turning in excellent results. There were no failures to feed, chamber, fire, or eject.

Moving to the absolute accuracy portion of the test, we fired from a solid benchrest using the Bullshooters pistol rest from Brownells.com. The SIG turned in excellent results. We limited the range to 15 yards since these are subcompact carry handguns, but just the same, this pistol's results were very good. The Black Hills Ammunition 155-grain load is a bit snappy but fast, even in the short-barrel SIG. This load sent five shots into an average of 1.5 inches. The Remington Golden Saber went into 1.6 inches, and the Hornady XTP averaged 1.5 inches, but with

a nice 1.1-inch group as well. While the SIG P-series is noted for accuracy, these results are well above what may be expected from a subcompact 40-caliber handgun.

Our Team Said: We liked the SIG a lot. Magazine capacity is the highest of the handguns tested and extension magazines are available. SIG P229 40 S&W magazines fit as well. Accuracy is excellent, so is reliability. The double-action first shot and short grip are difficult to acclimate to, especially for shooters used to striker-fired handguns. On the other hand, the double-action first shot is a safety feature that, coupled with the SIG's positive firing-pin block, makes the shooter less shy of carrying the piece in the appendix position. While the P224 isn't for everyone, it is a good pistol, perhaps even a great one. We rated the pistol down a grade based on the difficulty some raters had with it on the combat course.

Springfield Armory XD-S 3.3-inch XDS93340BE 40 S&W, $378

This was a recent price at BudsGunShop.com. The Springfield XD-S is a subcompact version of the Springfield XD series and is a polymer-frame striker-fired handgun. There is no manual safety, in common with the SIG, but there are safety features. There is a lever set in the trigger to prevent lateral discharge and a grip safety that prevents the pistol from firing unless the grip safety is depressed. At only 22 ounces and 6.3 inches in length with a 3.3-inch barrel, the XD-S offers good concealment with the proper holster. The pistol is right around an inch wide, a sweet spot for concealed carry.

The XD-S is considerably modified and more like the Glock trigger action compared to the full-size XD. As an example, the slide may be manipulated without depressing the grip safety, which isn't true of the full-size XD. The trigger isn't light at 6.5 pounds, but it is smooth and manageable. The sights are well-designed combat units, particularly the red-fiber-optic front sight. We like the deeply drilled white dots in the rear sight and also the nicely serrated rear face of each sight. The slide lock and magazine release are well designed and positive in operation. The magazine release is ambidextrous. There is a loaded chamber indicator that offers both a tactile and visual indicator. The grip fits most hands well.



Black Hills delivered the most pop in these test guns, producing between 358 foot-pounds and 447 foot-pounds of muzzle energy. The sole exception was Remington Ultimate Defense in the S&W Shield, which outpaced the Black Hills by 10 foot-pounds.

A few words on the grip treatment. Some of our raters have done pretty hard work, including working in a junk yard and other physical tasks with our hands. Just the same, after a box of ammunition, the raters had red hands with grooves in the skin. Perhaps gloves may be indicated for long practice sessions. If firing for real to save your life, you will not fire long strings, and you may appreciate the grip with cold, wet, or sweaty hands. The grip was not like holding a rat-tail file, but it takes some getting used to. After 60 rounds or so, the grip effect adds up.

Field-stripping the piece is easy. Lock the slide to the rear, remove the magazine, and be certain there isn't a round in the chamber. A lever on the left side of the frame rotates to allow the slide to run forward off the slide rails as the slide lock is released. You will have to pull the trigger first to allow the slide to move forward. Unload the handgun and you will not have a problem in field stripping, and there won't be any accidental shootings.

The Springfield XD-S is one of two pistols tested, along with the Taurus G2C, that features a light rail. It is short and stubby but accepts compact lights.

The pistol is supplied with two magazines, a 6-round box with a flat base and a 7-round magazine with an extended base. We split the firing test between the two magazines. For small-to-average hands, the XD-S is a good fit, and even shooters with large hands find the grip usable. The sights allow rapid acquisition of the sight picture. Most of our firing was done at silhouette targets at 5 and 7 yards. The pistol is fast, very fast from leather, and handles naturally. The heft is good, and the pistol points toward the target quickly for those who train. The raters acclimated to the rough grip in much the same way we acclimated to the SIG's short grip and double-action press, through trial and error. The harder the pistol is gripped, the more comfortable the firing experience. By gripping the pistol as tightly as possible, the raters left no room for the pistol to take a run and move about and abrade the skin. Knife instructors call this a "gorilla grip." This doesn't mean the pistol won't abrade the palm, but it is bearable in firing strings. The problem isn't drawing the handgun and firing but maintaining control, and the Springfield grip design solves this. If the grip abrades your palm during training, the solution is simple — wear gloves. If you have to use

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY XD-S 3.3-INCH XDS93340BE 40 S&W, $378

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

The Springfield XD-S struck us as more of a highly developed purpose-designed carry gun than the other handguns. The XD-S was completely reliable, accurate enough for personal defense, and exhibits good features, including a useful trigger action and good sights. While the grip was raspy, it did the job well. The pistol is supplied with both a flush-fit and an extended magazine. We liked this pistol the best of any of the handguns tested.



Action Type	Double-action-only
Overall Length	6.3 in.
Overall Height Compact Magazine	4.4 in.
Overall Height Extended Magazine	5.0 in.
Maximum Width	0.9 in.
Weight Unloaded	23.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	26.2 oz.
Slide Material	Forged steel, Melonite finish
Slide Retraction Effort	15.0 lbs.
Frame	Black polymer
Front Strap	1.9 in.
Back Strap	2.75 in.
Barrel Length	3.3 in. steel, Melonite finish, 1:16 twist
Grips	Textured Polymer
Grip Thickness (Maximum)	0.9 in.
Grip Circumference	5.75 in.
Magazines	Stainless steel; (1) 6-round flush fit; (1) 7-round w/Mid-Mag X-Tension
Rear Sight	Steel with white-dot insert
Front Sight	Fiber optic
Sight Radius	5.5 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	6.5 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.6 in.
Safeties	Lever set into trigger face, grip safety
Warranty	Lifetime
Telephone	(800) 680-6866
Website	Springfield-Armory.com
Made In	Croatia



Arrow: A grip safety located in the grip strap prevents the pistol from firing unless the lever is fully depressed. Good safety feature, we think.



Field-stripping the XD-S starts with an empty gun, then rotating the lever (arrow) on the left side of the frame. Turn that and the slide can run off the slide rails.



Above: In combat firing above, the Springfield gave excellent results. Also, it was faster to an accurate first shot than the SIG because we did not have to work the long DA SIG trigger with the XD-S. The XD-S produced groups as small as 2 inches, partly because of the easy-to-see red-fiber-optic front sight.



SMITH & WESSON SHIELD 180020 40 S&W, $337
GUN TESTS GRADE: D
SMITH & WESSON SHIELD 10034 40 S&W, $337
GUN TESTS GRADE: D

We tested two Shields, one with a safety and one without. The 180020 short-cycled, thus its poor grade. The 10034 was no more accurate, and the non-safety Shield had a failing trigger-return spring that caused a stoppage.



Action Type	Double-Action only, striker fire
Overall Length	6.1 in.
Overall Height	4.6 in.
Maximum Width	0.9 in.
Weight Unloaded	21.0 oz.
Weight Loaded	24.2 oz.
Slide Material	Steel
Slide Retraction Effort	15.4 lbs.
Frame	Black polymer over stainless-steel chassis
Front Strap Height	1.8 in.
Back Strap Height	2.8 in.
Barrel	3.1 in long, steel
Grips	Pebbled polymer
Grip Thickness (Maximum)	0.9 in.
Grip Circumference	5.25 in.
Magazine	(1) 6-round and (1) 7-round detachable box
Rear Sight	Dovetailed two white dots
Front Sight	Fixed dovetailed white dot
Sight Radius	5.3 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	7.0 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.6 in.
Safeties	Manual safety/no manual safety option
Warranty	1 Year
Telephone	(800) 331-0852
Website	Smith-Wesson.com
Made In	Springfield, MA

Some raters preferred the manual safety version, No. 180020, as shown. The version without a thumb safety is No. 10034. Both suffered disqualifying malfunctions in our tests.





The first Shield suffered numerous short cycles. It did not function with all ammunition.





Left: We liked the S&W's three-dot sights. Right: One mag offered 7+1 capacity.



During firing in a follow-up combat course head to head with the Springfield XD-S, the trigger on the Shield 10034 (no safety) failed to return to the set position. This could be a widowmaker in a real-life confrontation.



We wondered if the raters were not gripping the Shield correctly, causing short-cycling. We determined the problem was with the handgun itself, not the ammunition or the shooter.

the pistol for real, you will probably only fire a few cartridges.

In combat firing the Springfield gave excellent results, beating the other polymer-frame pistols and giving the SIG a run for the money. It was faster to an accurate first shot than the SIG, and while the SIG gave good, tight groups in rapid fire in the single-action mode, we did not have to work the long double-action SIG trigger with the XD-S. The first shot was easier. In firing for accuracy from the benchrest, we found it to be a pistol accurate enough for personal defense. Results were superior to the other polymer-frame handguns, but the Springfield XD-S was not as accurate as the SIG P224. The Springfield XD-S exhibited groups as small as 2 inches, but most were in the 2.5-inch range.

Our Team Said: For concealed carry, the XD-S is our preferred handgun. The excellent sights received high marks, the grip treatment results in a stable platform, and the trigger is controllable, with a rapid reset. The hard case and accessories provided, including a usable extended magazine, were all good features. It is unfortunate that Springfield has discontinued this model and other single-stacks in the family, according to the company website, but shooters will still be able to find new samples at retail. The XDS93340SE is the Bi-Tone model with silver slide, and the XDS93340DEE is FDE two-tone model with black slide and flat dark earth receiver.

Smith & Wesson Military & Police Shield 180020 40 S&W, $300
Smith & Wesson Military & Police Shield 10034 40 S&W, $300

These were recent prices at PalmettoStateArmory.com, though the non-safety-equipped Shield was not in stock. The line was introduced in 2012 and has been tested several times in 9mm here, with generally good results. The 9mm Shield is among the first pistols that gave birth to the term "slim line nine," and the single-stack 40 S&W version is equally thin and flat. Thin at under an inch in thickness, overall length is 6.1 inches, and the barrel is 3.1 inches long with a weight of 19 ounces unloaded. This isn't a heavy package.

The sights are good for the size of handgun, although we like the XD-S sights better. The pistol is supplied with a 6-round flush-fit magazine and a larger 7-round magazine. We added a Pro Mag extended magazine to the mix as well. ($20 from GunMagWarehouse.com) While not standard equipment, this 9-round magazine ran well and adds a new dimension to the Shield pistol. While it bulks the pistol up of course, some will say the magazine capacity is worthwhile, and at the worst, it makes sense as a spare magazine.

We noticed improvements in the Shield's trigger system compared to the full-size Military & Police pistols. The trigger doesn't use a lever set in the face in the Glock style but rather uses a hinged-type trigger that accomplishes the same purpose. The trigger action is the heaviest of the test at 7.4 pounds. It is manageable and compression is smooth enough, but the extra weight of the trigger took a toll on the pistol's accuracy during the firing test. The relatively short trigger reach made for good control because of the ability to place the distal joint of the finger on the trigger. This placement makes for better control of the relatively heavy trigger. The Shield 180020 is the only pistol that uses a manual safety. We like this safety; however, it is a bit far back for easy manipulation and requires practice to properly manipulate. We added a second Shield for comparison purposes, the No. 10034 without a safety, because we felt this is an important variant.

On the combat-firing course, the Shield turned in credible groups. However, when firing the primary test bed, the example with a safety short-cycled several times. We felt that perhaps the raters were not gripping the pistol correctly. This is, after all, among the harder-kicking pistols of the test. The senior rater rated the short cycles related to the handgun itself, not the ammunition or the shooter. We switched to the second handgun, the version without a safety. This pistol sailed through the combat course without any type of failure to feed, chamber, fire, or eject. While the Shield isn't difficult to control or shoot well, it will present a hurdle for some shooters, and the results were at the bottom of the list in combat ability. The Springfield XD-S with its solid grip and excellent sights, as well as a manageable trigger, exhibited better results. The Shield's size, heft and comfort will be attractive to many, but as far as combat use, we are more comfortable recommending the other slim 40 S&W caliber pistols.

In bench accuracy, the Shield turned in several 2.5-inch to 3.0-inch groups. While good enough for personal-defense use, we felt that if we could have

better accuracy in a firearm of similar size and weight, as well as price, we would take it. Most of the raters liked the version without a safety best, but others felt the safety was a good option, even if the shooter simply ignores it. We rated the 180020 down a half grade on accuracy, but of course it also failed based on malfunctions.

That left the safety-less 10034. Many times after we have run the pistols through a combat course and accuracy stages, we run the top pistols through again. Sometimes the best buy is elusive, and at this point, the raters were torn between the 10034 Shield and the XD-S as the best buy. We elected to run another 20 rounds through the pistols on the combat course, although the raters seem to have given the XD-S the higher marks. During this section, the Shield's trigger return failed and the pistol refused to fire during the second magazine. The rater racked the slide several times and attempted to bump the trigger forward. The trigger would not bump forward.

A bit of research into the problem opened our eyes. While we like to comment only on our hands-on experience, it appears the trigger-reset problem may be rare, but it is not unheard of. Because it was completely stopped until it could be repaired, we failed the 10034 as well.

Our Team Said: Stoppages with these guns in a self-defense scenario could be deadly, but they weren't dangerous to operate, so we spared them F grades. But GUN TESTS readers know a D grade is a strong enough signal to avoid these two 40 S&W–chambered Shields.

Kahr CW40 CW4043 40 S&W, $301

The CW40 is part of Kahr's Value Series, and this was a recent price for it at BudsGunShop.com. There are differences between the Value Series and the more expensive Kahr handguns. The pistol uses a conventionally rifled barrel rather than the polygonally rifled barrel found on high-end Kahr pistols. The CW-series slide stop lever is a metal-injection-molded part instead of machined steel. The slide markings are not as deeply cut as the high-end Kahr handguns, and there is a simple box for the CW rather than a lockable hard case. The front sight isn't dovetailed in but is instead pinned in place. Only a single magazine is supplied. Overall length is 6.35 inches, the barrel is 3.6 inches long, and the slide width is only .94 inch. The pistol weighs but 18.6 ounces unloaded. The slide is matte stainless and the frame is polymer. The slide doesn't have the same precise cuts as the more expensive Kahr versions. While angular in appearance, it is as strong as any other, and the forward edge of the slide is beveled for easy holstering. The frame is nicely pebbled and checkered for good adhesion and abrasion. This is a slim pistol, and the grip fits most hands well. The action, to the best of our knowledge after testing the pistol, is the same as the more expensive Kahr handguns. The Kahr double-action trigger is a smooth 7 pounds. All raters said that the action felt lighter than it registered on the Lyman electronic trigger gauge. The CW40 uses a trigger action that Kahr calls a cocking cam trigger system. As the trigger is pressed, the firing pin block is released, allowing the firing pin to spring forward when the trigger is pressed. The trigger stroke is very smooth. While every trigger press is a separate event, the Kahr invited a smooth rolling press and trigger reset that made for excellent speed.



These are the basic, but fine, drift-adjustable (rear) white bar/dot combat sights found on the CW4043. The company's TP4043N model comes with a rear low profile 2-dot tritium sight, front tritium sight combination. Tritium night sights are also available on the P40 and PM40 made by Kahr Firearms Group.

The Kahr features a relatively thin grip. The pistol is comfortable in the hand and light enough to carry. During the firing test, the pistol never failed to feed, chamber, fire, or eject, a must for a self-defense gun. From previous testing of the Kahr pistol, we have learned that the proper means of loading it is to lock the slide to the rear and insert a loaded magazine, then drop the slide. If loading the pistol by inserting a loaded magazine and then racking the slide, there are times when the striker will not properly reset, resulting in a light primer strike.

During the firing evaluation, the CW40 gave good results. The pistol is light and kicks the more than other pistols, our shooters said. The grip frame is longer than some, which helped mitigate recoil. The CW40 features a smooth trigger action, and this aided in turning in good combat groups. The raters like the trigger action and found the sights acceptable. We felt that the trigger action helped control recoil, as it was smooth enough that you simply had to let it reset as you brought the front sight back down after firing. Combat groups were centered on the target. The pistol is clearly well suited to personal defense.

On the bench, the CW40 turned in good results, with greater accuracy than the Shield pistol. The CW40 turned in five-shot groups of 2.0 to 3.0 inches with the three accuracy loads tested.

Our Team Said: We found the CW40 to be a good all-round handgun. However, compared to the Springfield XD-S at a similar price, the Kahr was not supplied with a heavy locking box and two magazines. The sights were much less effective than the

KAHR CW40 CW4043 40 S&W, $301

GUN TESTS GRADE: B

The Kahr is a well-made and reliable handgun, despite a number of corners being cut to offer the pistol at a low price. The action is as smooth as any other Kahr handgun we have tested. We would have liked a spare magazine with the pistol.



Action Type	Trigger cocking DAO; lock breech; "Browning - type" recoil lug
Overall Length	6.35 in.
Overall Height	4.62 in.
Maximum Width	1.12 in.
Weight Unloaded	18.6 oz.
Weight Loaded	22.0 oz.
Slide Material	Matte stainless steel
Slide Retraction Effort	13.5 lbs.
Frame	Black pebbled polymer
Front Strap	2.0 in.
Back Strap	2.6 in.
Barrel Length	3.6 in. long, 1:16: RH twist
Grip Thickness (Maximum)	0.93 in.
Grip Circumference	5.0 in.
Magazine	(1) 6-round detachable box
Rear Sight	Dovetail Bar Dot system
Front Sight	Staked post
Sight Radius	5.21 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	6.2 lbs.
Trigger Span	3.0 in.
Safeties	Passive striker block
Warranty	5 years
Telephone	(508) 795-3919
Website	ShopKahrFirearmsGroup.com
Made In	Worcester, MA



During testing, a sliver of polymer frame was gouged out, but without any effect on function.



The flats on the slide allow easy holstering.



We liked the Kahr's pebbled grip.

Springfield XD-S set as well, we thought. Also, we noted an odd thing during the firing test. A strand of polymer was scraped from the frame. It did not affect function, and the pistol seemed okay after the firing test. We have never seen this before.

Taurus G2C 1-G2C4031-10O 40 S&W, $250

We tested the PT 111 9mm previously and found a credible, reliable and accurate handgun. Often enough, the change to 40 S&W from a 9mm platform results in a less reliable and certainly a less tractable and controllable handgun. We set out to compare the 40 S&W caliber Taurus to the other handguns in firing tests, and to our recollections of its 9mm version as well. The updated G2C has improvements over the previous pistol. The slide is now finished in a durable matte-type finish. The trigger safety bar is now solid rather than hollow. The pebbled finish of the G2C differs from earlier handguns. The matte finish slide is beveled at the muzzle for easy holstering, but it also is smoothed over at the rear of the slide. The pistol is pleasing in appearance compared to the other handguns tested. The slide is less angular than the Kahr's, as an example.

The slide features a characteristic dished out section in the slide, and the cocking grooves offer a positive gripping surface. The sights feature a three-white-dot configuration, offering rapid acquisition

TAURUS G2C 1-G2C4031-100 40 S&W, $250

GUN TESTS GRADE: B

The Taurus G2C is an upgrade over the original, with superior grip treatment and a new matte-finished slide. Inside, the trigger bar's angle has been subtly changed as well. The pistol is reliable and accurate enough. The trigger takes some getting used to, but is usable with practice.



Action Type	Single action, with double-action restrike
Overall Length	6.2 in.
Overall Height	5.14 in.
Maximum Width	1.25 in.
Weight Unloaded	21.2 oz.
Weight Loaded	25 oz.
Slide Material	Blue-finish steel
Slide Retraction Effort	16.1 lbs.
Frame	Pebbled polymer, olive drab
Front Strap Height (w/o magazine extension)	1.8 in.
Back Strap Height	3.25 in.
Barrel	Steel
Barrel Length	3.25 in.
Grips	Pebbled polymer
Grip Thickness (Maximum)	1.2 in.
Grip Circumference	5.3 in.
Magazine	(2) 10-round steel
Rear Sight	Adjustable
Front Sight	Fixed
Sight Radius	5.23 in.
Trigger Pull Weight	5.5 lbs.
Trigger Span	2.5 in.
Safeties	Manual safety/lever insert in trigger
Warranty	Lifetime
Telephone	(800) 327-3776
Website	TaurusUSA.com
Made In	Brazil



Fired offhand, the 40 S&W Taurus isn't a light kicker, but it is controllable. Despite the 40 S&W's reputation as a more difficult pistol to control, the raters enjoyed shooting the G2C.



Take down is simple enough.



The pebbled grip of the Taurus pistol earned high grades for its design and execution, close to the XD-S but not as abrasive.



Left: We like the manual safety: easy to feel, positive in operation.



The Taurus features a lever set into the trigger that prevents lateral discharge. Good safety feature, and familiar.

in daylight. The rear sight is easily adjustable for windage, a big advantage because the others are only driftable. The polymer frame features steel inserts to allow the slide to ride in the frame, similar to the other pistols. The Taurus features a lever that rises near the rear of the chamber when the chamber is loaded to act as a loaded-chamber indicator. The G2C features a manual safety, and the frame allows mounting a compact combat light.

The pebbled grip of the Taurus pistol earned high grades for its design and execution. The gripping surface is excellent overall, close to the Springfield XD-S in most ways but not as abrasive. The grip, front strap, and rear strap are nicely textured. The trigger action takes some getting used to. The first shot breaks about 5.5 pounds of pressure after a long take-up meets abrupt pressure. It is in effect a two-stage trigger, about 2 pounds initially and then the rest in the final heavy pull.

You may ride the trigger of subsequent shots to alleviate the long take up. If the pistol fails to fire, however, the trigger may be pressed again for a long DA-type trigger, effectively providing a second strike feature. Most of the raters agreed that if the first cartridge does not fire, the round needs to be ejected and another loaded, but some like a second-strike feature. There is a lever set in the face of the trigger that prevents lateral discharge. Since the mechanism is a single action, this is a useful feature. The safety suffers from the same leverage problem the Shield exhibited, however, because the G2C's safety is well designed and rides on the frame, it wasn't overly difficult to operate. The safety should always be applied when carrying this SA handgun.

The magazine release is positive in operation. The pistol is supplied with two magazines. Specifications call them 10-round capacities, but the raters could not quite press the last round into place until we were nearly done with the test. Most of our shooting was done with the mags loaded a round short, making the package a 9+1. Not the worst round count to have. Only the larger SIG pistol has as much capacity, and while the Taurus isn't an expensive handgun, the pistol is supplied with two magazines and a locking box.

The firing tests went well. There were no failures to feed, chamber, fire, or eject. The raters found the sights are small for combat shooting. The primary complaint was a spongy trigger that some felt they were not in control of as well as the other handguns. Other raters felt that the trigger allowed good fast work on the combat course. In personal defense, being in control of the trigger break is more important than running a lot of cartridges into the target, we feel, and the trigger, while not a complete demerit, demands some time to master.

The pistol was reliable. Recoil is snappy in common with the other lightweight 40s. It is not as docile as the P224, but it is no worse than the Springfield XD-S.



We tested the Shield with Galco's Triton holster and the Springfield with the Galco King Tuk. Both are excellent choices for concealed carry.

Accuracy at 15 yards is acceptable, if not outstanding. Most groups were in the 2.5- to 3.0-inch range.

Our Team Said: We rated the Taurus G2C down a half grade based on its less-than-ideal combat sights and another half grade on the trigger action. Also, slide-retraction effort is the heaviest of the pistols tested. The 40 S&W cartridge demands a strong recoil spring to control recoil, but this measurement is a consideration for those with limited hand strength. All in, the Taurus G2C is reliable and accurate enough for personal defense, but it is not our first choice. We debated making the G2C the Best Buy. After all, it works well and is certainly worth its modest price. However, it isn't about the lowest price but the most performance for the money. We prefer the XD-S and rated it Best Buy. We would buy the Taurus only if the shooter's budget could not stretch enough to cover the Springfield.

- **Looking back over the test, our shooters found that the handguns were reliable in four of the total six pistols tested. One of the two Smith & Wesson Shield handguns suffered short cycling, leading us to believe the pistol was not properly harnessing 40 S&W recoil. The second Shield sailed through to the end and then suffered a trigger return spring failure. Each handgun turned in decent groups in both combat firing and in absolute accuracy. We simply can't recommend these guns based on our experience with them, and taking into consideration that none of the others had function issues.**
- **The SIG P224 was the most accurate handgun, but it is also the largest, heaviest, and most expensive. Some raters hated the short grip, others made the best of it. We certainly recommend that you rent one to see if you like it.**
- **The Kahr is an affordable handgun with good performance. It is light and easily concealed. This is the only pistol supplied without a spare magazine from the factory.**
- **The Taurus offered better performance than the Kahr at a lower price and is supplied with two magazines. If you prefer a manual safety, there is no other choice but the Smith & Wesson Shield safety variant or the Taurus G2C.**
- **The Springfield XD-S comes with two magazines at a fair price and is delivered in a lockable hard case. There is no manual safety, but it has good safety features nonetheless. The pistol is an excellent design for concealed carry with an abrasive but very sure grip that offers good purchase when firing heavy loads. The fiber-optic front sight is an advantage. The XD-S trigger is useful, with an advantage over the Smith & Wesson Shield, Kahr, and Taurus pistols, we felt, in controllability and also superior to the SIG's double-action first shot trigger. The Springfield has a combination of value and features we like.**

Written and photographed by GUN TESTS *Staff, using evaluations from* GUN TESTS *team testers.* **GT**

VALUE GUIDE: 10MM & 40 S&W HANDGUN RANKINGS			
GUN NAME	**ISSUE**	**GRADE**	**COMMENTS**
Glock G40 Gen4 MOS 10mm Auto, $706	Mar. 2019	A	Longer sight radius and ability to mount a red-dot optic made the G40 a close contender for top dog in the test.
Springfield 1911 RO Elite Operator 10mm Auto, $1145	Mar. 2019	A	Well adapted for the 10mm cartridge. We like the sights and love the trigger. Grip texture is a bit raspy.
Springfield Armory XDM 10mm Auto, $779	Mar. 2019	A	Best Buy. Great ergonomics, nice grip angle, modular grip strap, crisp trigger, nice sights. Reasonable cost.
Glock G35 Gen3 PI3530103 40 S&W, $560	July 2017	A	The G35 in 40 S&W is a good competition pistol. A 9mm barrel makes it more affordable to shoot.
Smith & Wesson Model 1076 10mm Auto, $800-$825	Nov. 2017	A-	As a compact 10mm, a used 1076 is an excellent choice. Trigger could have been better.
Colt Delta Elite O2020XE 10mm Auto, $1099	Nov. 2017	A	The latest Delta Elite is an excellent full-size 1911 chambered in 10mm. We liked the trigger, sights, grip.
EAA Tanfoglio Witness 10mm Auto, $665	May 2017	A	Best Buy. Relatively compact and accurate, plus it is affordable.
Dan Wesson Bruin Bronze 1881 10mm Auto, $2194	May 2017	A	If you are in need of a 10mm hunting pistol, the Bruin is an excellent choice, despite its expense.
Kimber Custom TLE II 3200347 10mm Auto, $1028	May 2017	A-	Excellent version of a full-size 1911 platform chambered in 10mm. Grips chewed up our hands.
SIG Sauer P226R Factory Certified 40 S&W, $725	June 2016	A-	The pre-owned SIG P226R turned in as-new performance. Reliable and fast handling.
Beretta Model 96 Vertec Inox 40 S&W, ~$600 Used	June 2016	A	Accuracy was good, if not outstanding. The pistol was reliable and we liked the safety features.
Ruger SR40 3470 40 S&W, $569	June 2016	B	The pistol exhibited more felt recoil than the others; however, it was also lighter.
CZ-USA CZ 75B 01120 40 S&W, $580	June 2016	B	The CZ 75 was accurate, reliable, and combat worthy. Lacked decocker and accessory rail.
Glock G20 Gen4 10mm, $687	May 2016	A	This G20 offered the most DIY customization, was the softest shooter and was accurate.
Rock Island Armory TAC Ultra FS 10mm, $819	May 2016	B+	This 10mm offered lots of custom 1911 features and great accuracy at a good price.
SIG Sauer P220-10 Match Elite 10mm, $1417	May 2016	B	Diehard SIG fans liked this pistol. It was refined and pleasant to shoot, but very expensive.
Smith & Wesson M&P40c 109203 40 S&W, $480	Jan. 2015	A-	Credible handgun with good design, reliability, and combat-shooting performance.
Beretta PX4 Storm JXS4F20FC 40 S&W, $511	Jan. 2015	B	The Storm isn't the lightest 40-caliber subcompact, but it is among the easiest to fire.
FNH-USA FNP-40 40 S&W No. 47832, $450	July 2013	B+	Clean ergonomics in the grip, smooth and easy use, simple takedown.
SIG Sauer SP2022 E2022-40-B 40 S&W, $570	July 2013	B	The grips had the best texture, but we preferred the overall ergonomics of others.

Simple, Effective 12 Gauges: Shotguns with a Little Bling

No, you don't 'need' the copperhead scales of the Iver Johnson, the lustrous finish of the Mossberg Retrograde, or the minimalist stainless-and-black appearance of the RIA M5. But they are fun.

The 12-gauge shotgun continues to be the most respected shoulder-fired firearm for personal defense. Simple to use, effective, reliable and available in economy versions to fit every budget, the 12-gauge pump is a superior firearm for home defense, for use as a truck gun, and even for area defense on the ranch or farm. In this report, we tested several shotguns with a touch of flash or "bling." They are special versions of standard shotguns, based on proven types, but with features that set them apart from the usual matte-finished shotgun with inexpensive wood furniture.

- The *Mossberg 500 Retrograde 50429* shotgun is a highly finished version of the Mossberg Persuader. This shotgun features the standard Mossberg 500 action, but its bright-blue finish and highly finished stock are a step above the usual rack-grade shotgun. The Mossberg is almost priced out of the economy range, but at less than $400 with careful shopping, it isn't prohibitively expensive.
- The *Iver Johnson PAS 12 Copperhead* is a pump-action shotgun with interesting features and a special coating resembling a copperhead snake's skin.
- The *Rock Island Armory M5* shotgun is a straight-up copy of the classic High Standard Flite King but is finished in matte nickel. These shotguns have a pleasing appearance, with a bit of eye appeal not found in the usual economy shotgun.

We would purchase any of these shotguns, but one proved to be our shooters' favorite and the Best Buy of the test.

Mossberg Retrograde Persuader 50429 12 Gauge, $385

MSRP for this product is $504, but we bought ours at SCGunCo.com for $385. The Mossberg Retrograde Persuader is a new introduction on an old theme. Officially called the Retrograde line, Mossberg also offers a 590 shotgun in this series. The Mossberg 500 is a pump-action shotgun with a five-round tubular magazine. The Mossberg Retrograde reinvents a popular model, the Persuader. The Persuader is a standard Mossberg 500 with an 18.5-inch barrel and bead front sight. The Retrograde line features a highly polished blue finish and well-turned-out wooden stock. While designed to harken back to Mossberg shotguns of previous years, the Retrograde shotgun is better finished and polished than any Mossberg we have examined and better than most shotguns of any type. While there is a race in progress in the firearms world to produce the least expensive firearms of any given type, there are also those willing to pay





Far left: This is the Iver Johnson knocking the dust off a silhouette target at 15 yards. Near left, a closer look at the paper, above, reveals a sobering outcome for a home invader who tries to breach the defenses of the castle protected by this 12 gauge.

MOSSBERG RETROGRADE PERSUADER 50429 12 GAUGE, $384

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Mossberg 500 Retrograde is a beautifully finished shotgun. There are no shortcomings. The Retrograde 12 gauge worked fine in all regards including loading, cycling, feeding, ejecting and firing. The shotgun handles quickly and invites a natural shooting style. With all those positives, the shotgun isn't any more effective than the less-expensive imports.



Action Type	Manual pump action
Chamber Size	3.0 in.
Overall Length	39.5 in.
Overall Height	5.0 in.
Capacity	5+1
Weight Unloaded	7.8 lbs.
Weight Loaded	8.7 lbs.
Barrel Length	18.5 in.
Finish	High-polish blued
Choke	Cylinder
Buttstock	Walnut with ventilated recoil pad
Buttstock Length of Pull	13.8 in.
Forend	Grooved walnut
Front Sight	Bead
Trigger Pull Weight	6.0 lbs.
Safety	Tang-mounted sliding switch
Warranty	2 years
Telephone	(800) 363-3555
Website	Mossberg.com
Made In	U.S.A.

for superior fit and finish. The Mossberg Retrograde offers considerable pride of ownership, and the wood is particularly nicely finished. While the Retrograde is a classic shotgun in appearance, it is drilled and tapped for a red-dot sight or scope mount.

Retro guns are popular, and this one has the look and feel of an older shotgun. When it comes to function, though, the shotgun operates the same as any other Mossberg pump-action shotgun. The Mossberg 500 is loaded by pressing five 2.75-inch 12-gauge shells into the magazine. The action is racked to load the chamber. If desired, an additional shell may be placed in the magazine, giving the Mossberg 500 a maximum of six shells on tap. The safety is tang mounted and ambidextrous and positive in operation. The raters agreed that the tang-mounted safety is superior in speed and operation to trigger-guard-mounted crossbolt safeties. A small lever just behind the trigger guard releases the bolt when the shotgun is cocked. On firing, the bolt releases to allow the pump action to rack another shell into the chamber.

To test the shotguns for speed and recoil control, we used a total of five loads including 00, #1, and #4 buckshot, and two types of birdshot shells. These included Winchester 2.75-inch #4 buckshot ($4.36 for five shells) rounds and Winchester 2.75-inch #1 buckshot shells ($4.36 for five shells, both from SportsmansGuide.com); Fiocchi 2.75-inch Dove Load #8 shotshells ($85 for 250 rounds from AmmoMan.com), Winchester AA #7½ loads ($8.99/25), and Remington 00 buckshot Managed Recoil ($4.99/5 at Academy.com).

We began running the Mossberg at 7 and 10 yards with the Fiocchi bird-shot load. We have used this load many times for economy and function. During the test, there were several light primer strikes as the load failed ignite, at a rate of perhaps 50%. We were disappointed and moved to Winchester AA loads. There were no further failures to fire. Moving forward to testing the Iver Johnson, we experienced the same FTF with the Fiocchi load, so we had to mark this down to ammunition and not the shotgun. After this issue, we continued the Mossberg portion of the test. Firing the bird-shot load, the action proved smooth and reliable. We cannot say if the Retrograde received extra care in the action. It was no more or less smooth than a Mossberg 590 recently tested. Either way, this is a good, solid and fast-handling action. After firing 50 light bird-shot shells, we moved to buckshot. Leaning into the shotgun for control, we fired the Winchester buckshot loads, both #1 and #4. These loads provide 16 and 27 pellets, respectively. The pattern was good in each case and offered a good spread on the targets out to 10 yards. Recoil was strong with these loads.

The bead front sight offered a good aiming point at moderate range. As we approached 15 yards, some of the #4 buckshot was off the hit zone, on the paper but not inside the green silhouette. Switching to Remington's managed recoil 00 buckshot load, we





Above: The old-school forend provided adequate gripping surface for rapid manipulation. Right: We used a combination of buckshot and birdshot to test the shotguns. Below: Fired offhand, the Mossberg Retrograde Model 500 proved reliable and smooth in action. With buckshot loads aboard, recoil was stiff in all the shotguns.





The Mossberg tang mounted safety is the easiest and fastest to manipulate, we thought.



A simple front bead is all that is needed for most incidents. The Persuader is a great-handling shotgun that operates like any other Model 500 action. We have graded M500 Mossbergs well in many other tests, and the same goes here.

repeated firing at 7, 10, and 15 yards. The pattern remained tight to 15 yards and this reduced recoil loading was controllable.

We fired a total of 50 bird-shot shells and 45 buck-shot shells, firing five shells at 7, 10, and 15 yards with each type of buckshot. The bird shot was expended primarily to test the action's smoothness. There were no failures that may be attributed to the shotgun.

Our Team Said: When the raters compared notes, the Mossberg 500 Retrograde shotgun received an A rating. The shotgun is reliable, the action is smooth, and the 12-gauge pump handles well. We liked the tang-mounted safety the best of the shotguns tested. There are shotguns with superior sights and extended magazines, but this is a formidable choice.

Iver Johnson PAS12 Copperhead Edition 12 Gauge, $180

This was our purchase price for a used Copperhead at SCGunCo.com. It appeared unfired, however, and was found with the original box. We could not find a Copperhead edition for sale and in stock. We contacted Iver Johnson and were told that the Copperhead is a special edition that often has a waiting list. The standard PAS 12 gauge lists for $203 at BudsGunShop.com. The standard PAS 12 would be the least expensive shotgun tested if we had ordered that piece. This is a standard pump-action shotgun manufactured by Armed Guns in Turkey.

The Copperhead Cerakote-type finish is distinctive, but we are not certain we would pay an extra $250 for the finish. The shotgun itself is a pump-action that operates much the same as any other pump shotgun, but with a number of differences. The shotgun has very interesting features apart from its copperhead-snake-like finish.

The shotgun operates like the Mossberg in most particulars. The magazine holds four rather than five shells, which is a demerit compared to the Mossberg and Rock Island Armory shotguns. However, there are other features that are superior to the other shotguns. The PAS 12 features a trapezoid-shaped crossbolt safety. We cannot find any difference between a round and trapezoid-type safety in operation, but the safety is positive in operation. One rater felt that the design was less likely to allow the finger to slip during movement. The bolt release, however, is extended and makes for much easier manipulation than the other shotguns. It is located a bit more forward than the other bolt-release levers. There was no debate on the merits of this feature. The barrel-locking nut is the best shape we have yet tested for easy manipulation. Long grooves in this oversized barrel-locking nut make

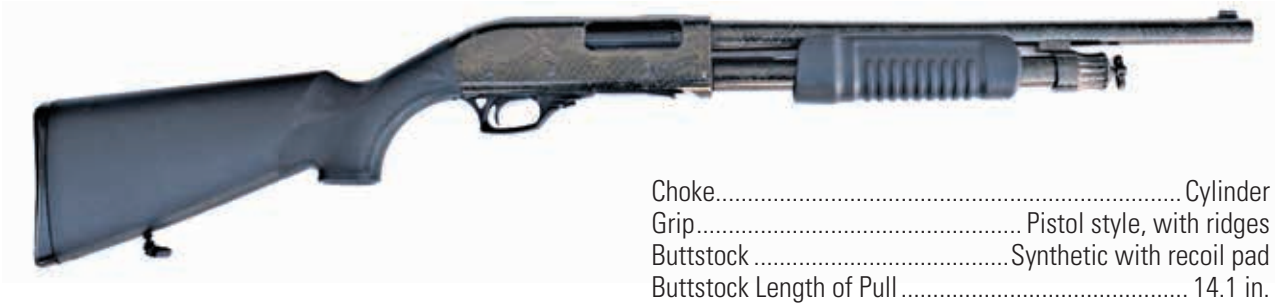


The Fiocchi birdshot loads exhibited a number of light primer strikes in the Mossberg Retro and the Iver Johnson PAS 12, but not the Rock Island Armory M5 pumpgun.

IVER JOHNSON PAS COPPERHEAD 12 GAUGE, $401

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The Iver Johnson pump-action shotgun has good features that were overshadowed by the snakescale-like finish. The action is smooth enough and never failed to feed, chamber, fire or eject. While we had a few shells that failed to fire, the same shells failed to fire in the Mossberg as well, which points to the shells being at fault. Overall, this is a solid, reliable shotgun that gets a solid A rating. It would be a Best Buy at the $203 price for the Standard finish. We would not pop for the extra bucks for the cool-looking snakeskin finish.



Action Type	Manual pump , dual action rails
Chamber Size	3.0 in.
Overall Length	38.5 in.
Overall Height	5.0 in.
Capacity	4+1
Weight Unloaded	5.9 lbs.
Weight Loaded	6.8 lbs.
Barrel Length	18.5 in.
Metal Finish	Snake-scale-pattern aluminum alloy
Choke	Cylinder
Grip	Pistol style, with ridges
Buttstock	Synthetic with recoil pad
Buttstock Length of Pull	14.1 in.
Forend	Ribbed synthetic with belled back
Front Sight	Post
Rear Sight	None
Trigger Pull Weight	7.2 lbs.
Safety	Crossbolt, rear trigger guard
Warranty	Limited 1 year
Telephone	(321) 636-3377
Website	IverJohnsonArms.com
Made In	Turkey



All of the shotguns loaded through an under-the-barrel port (arrow above) into a tubular magazine. Below, the shooter shoves a shell onto the ramp, then further into the tube, below right.



The knurled take down knob is an advantage in field-stripping the Iver Johnson.





for easy handling. The bolt is smooth in operation as it moves in the aluminum receiver. The front sight isn't a simple bead but is instead a dovetailed post that offers an excellent aiming point.

The PAS 12 features an aluminum receiver. The shotgun is light enough and for this reason was the hardest kicker tested. This isn't a design defect, the shotgun is easily carried, and there is no free lunch. We would have changed the odd design of the recoil pad. It really did not help control recoil compared to the other shotguns. The front sight is superior to any simple bead front sight. The knurled take down knob is easy to use well, the easiest to use we have encountered on a shotgun. The large bolt release is something we feel is an advantage in handling.

The Iver Johnson was fired with the same shells as the Mossberg. When firing the Fiocchi, we encountered the same light strikes as with the Mossberg, discovering the failure to fire was ammo related. Firing the birdshot first, we found the PAS 12 operated quickly. The forend is well shaped for rapid manipulation. The front-post sight offered an



Above: Compared to a standard 28-inch barrel shotgun, the Iver Johnson (left) is a light and fast-handling shotgun. The shorter shotguns handle more quickly. Below: The snakeskin finish on the PAS is evenly applied.



The PAS 12 is a solid performer. The pump action design gave no problems in testing. The PAS 12 features an aluminum receiver, which accounts for its light weight. As a result, the PAS 12 kicked the most of the three shotguns, but it is reliable and hits hard. It is worth its modest price, we think.



Above, arrow: We liked the PAS 12's extended bolt release, which is well designed and offers extra leverage. The arrow below shows its location on the shotgun.





Left: We liked the sure feel and engagement of the IJ's trapezoidal safety.

excellent aiming point for use with all loads. Firing the buckshot loads, patterns were more or less the same as the Mossberg. Shotguns are individuals concerning patterns, and in this case there was no real difference among the shotguns in patterning. There was a difference in recoil, however. The PAS 12 exhibited greater recoil than the Mossberg, at least partly due to the stock design. Just the same, the PAS 12 was completely reliable and fast in action.

Our Team Said: The PAS 12 is a decent pump-action shotgun at a very fair price. We like the improvements in the bolt release and barrel nut, as well as the sights. Half the raters felt the trapezoid-shaped safety was less likely to present a surface for the finger to slip. We don't think we would purchase the Copperhead finish, however. It was showing signs of wear by the end of a few weeks testing.

Rock Island Armory M30 M5 Matte Nickel 51330 12 Gauge, $202

This was a recent price at BudsGunShop.com. The M5 is a copy of the High Standard Flite King. This design features a barrel that screws into the steel

receiver. This isn't a shotgun that takes down easily. Still, routine maintenance isn't difficult.

The Rock Island M5 isn't advertised as a marine shotgun, but perhaps it should be. Marine shotguns with nickel finish or stainless-steel barrels are popular with boaters and sailors. When the shotgun arrived, it was coated in a heavy grease. We cleaned this off before firing. Shipping from the Philippines requires a long ride by boat, truck, and plane at different points, and the coating protects the finish, though the M5 doesn't have much to rust.

Many such shotguns have been used to dispatch thrashing sharks caught in a net or perhaps to repel boarders. The Rock Island M5 features a matte-nickel finish. The senior rater owns an example that has been in use for several years as a truck gun and reports that the finish has been durable. A new M5 was ordered as a test gun. The finish is a matte nickel that is evenly applied. The shotgun features a 20-inch barrel, longer than the other two shotguns. The magazine holds five shells rather than the four of the Iver Johnson PAS 12, though the company specs say the tube magazine only holds four. The M5 is identical in operation to the other shotguns. However, the shell carrier is upward when the bolt is locked forward on this design, making loading fast and easy. The safety is located in the trigger guard. It is forward of the trigger, while the Iver Johnson safety is behind the trigger. With one you operate the safety by moving it to the off position to fire and then sweep forward to the trigger. With the other, you hit the safety button with the forefinger and then move to the trigger. We found no real difference in speed, but half the raters preferred the forward safety location of the M5. The bolt release is a standard lever that works well. The barrel features a heat shield. This shield is to protect the hand during prolonged firing. We really like the heat shield, but we did not fire the shotgun enough to heat the barrel up. Just the same, it is good to have. The barrel nut isn't similar to the other shotguns.

ROCK ISLAND ARMORY M30 M5 MATTE NICKEL 51330 12 GAUGE, $202

GUN TESTS GRADE: A- (BEST BUY)

The M5 is a smooth-handling shotgun. It is the heaviest shotgun tested, but also the lightest kicker — physics. Magazine capacity is greater than the Iver Johnson, but the same as the Mossberg. The Speedfeed-type stock is a good addition.



Action Type	Manual pump action
Chamber Size	3.0 in.
Overall Length	40.0 in.
Overall Height	7.0 in.
Capacity	5+1
Weight Unloaded	7.8 lbs.
Weight Loaded	8.7 lbs.
Barrel	20.0 in. long, with heat shield
Finish	Matte nickel steel
Choke	Cylinder
Buttstock	Polymer with recoil pad, textured pistol grip
Buttstock Length of Pull	13.85 in.
Forend	Grooved polymer
Front Sight	Bead front
Trigger Pull Weight	4.5 lbs.
Safety	Crossbolt style, front trigger guard
Warranty	Lifetime
Telephone	(775) 537-1444
Website	Armscor.com
Made In	Philippines



Left: While we liked the heat shield (arrow), we did not manage to get the barrel smoking hot during our testing.



Left: Note the simple bead front sight (top arrow). The "rear sight" is nothing more than a serration on top of the receiver. Also, the M5 doesn't have a magazine cap (bottom arrow).

There really isn't a barrel nut, just a magazine cap. The barrel is attached to the magazine, and the heat shield is also attached to the barrel and the magazine. The stock is a Speedfeed type that holds two shells on one side. They are in a spring-loaded recess in the stock. A tab holds the nose of the shell in place. Move the shell to one side and the shell jumps out of the recess. This allows rapid access to spare loads without a bulky magazine carrier.

A bonus was a very smooth 4.5-pound trigger pull, unusual in a pump-action shotgun. We began firing the shotgun with the loads as the other shotguns. In this case the Fiocchi loads fed well, as they had in the other shotguns, and also fired normally, which was not the case in the other two shotguns. Perhaps the M5 had a tighter chamber that made the shell primer sit closer to the firing pin, but no shells seemed to be a tight fit in this shotgun.

All three shotguns feature dual action bars and seemed to have good leverage in operation. The M5, however, was the smoothest. We discerned this in dry fire and with the first box of shells fired. The shotgun simply moved slickly, despite its slightly longer length. Operating the forend was simple enough with the ribbed synthetic design. Forward action was very smooth as well.

Firing the M5 for speed showed the best results of any of the shotguns. The front bead was adequate for getting on target fast and delivering center hits. The Speedfeed stock, although it required separate motions to load the two shells, improved the M5's capacity over the others.

At the range, recoil seemed the lightest, but then the M5 is the heaviest shotgun. It wasn't difficult to get a couple of shells in the air at the same time with the Rock Island M5. As for buckshot, we found the M5 gave slightly better groups with both #1 and #4 buckshot than the Mossberg and Iver Johnson shotguns. The difference wasn't great, perhaps an inch to an inch and a half smaller size, and the Remington Managed Recoil load patterned the same. We cannot rate the Rock Island M5 higher on this score as shotguns are individuals as far as patterning goes, we have learned. Also the M5 features a barrel 1.5 inches longer than the other two shotguns, so we would expect it to have a patterning advantage over 18.5-inch barrel shotguns.

We found the M5 handled quickly and pointed well, and the extra 1.5 inch of barrel isn't a demerit in fast handling. In short the M5 is smooth in operation and lighter in recoil, making it a winner. We experienced a single unwanted malfunction that we wrote down to a break-in malfunction. When we tested the Speedfeed-type stock's feeding, the shell plunger stuck to the rear. The shells were not held under tension. We jiggled the shotgun to no avail, even using a screwdriver to attempt to budge the shell plunger. One of the raters triple checked the shotgun to be certain it wasn't loaded and threw it into the air and let it hit a carpeted surface. The plunger sprung forward. We could not re-create the problem, but we would be certain this plunger operates correctly on our personal shotgun. We rated the M5 down a half grade anyway.

Our Team Said: We found the Rock Island Armory M5 to be on par with the Iver Johnson as far as economy goes, and the M5's nickel finish will likely require less maintenance than the Mossberg and IJ finishes. We feel that the nickel finish qualifies the M5 for hard use. The heatshield on the barrel is good to have, even if you don't shoot enough shells to make the barrel smoke. We really like the crisp trigger action and Speedfeed-style stock. The best feature, however, is the smooth action. This is a shotgun that offers real speed to a trained shooter who keeps in practice. The Rock Island shotgun isn't drilled and tapped for a red dot, but at this price, we find that acceptable.

Written and photographed by GUN TESTS *Staff, using evaluations from* GUN TESTS *team testers.* GT

We like the Speedfeed option. Two shells fit in that slot and were held under spring action. The stock is a good fit for most shooters.





We had an opportunity to compare this RIA M5 to the stats of a previous test gun. While identical in appearance, the earlier shotgun exhibited a much heavier trigger action at 7.8 pounds compared to the present production's 4.5 pounds.

VALUE GUIDE: RECENT SELF-DEFENSE SHOTGUN RANKINGS			
GUN NAME	**ISSUE**	**GRADE**	**COMMENTS**
Mossberg 590 Shockwave Model 50657 20 Gauge, $455	Mar. 2019	A	The Shockwave in 20 gauge substantially reduces felt recoil. We liked the strapped forend.
Mossberg 590 Shockwave Model 50649 .410 Bore, $455	Mar. 2019	A	Loaded with one of the specialty 410 defense loads, this would make a good home-defense choice.
Remington Model 870 TAC-14 81145 20 Gauge, $464	Mar. 2019	A-	If you are a Remington 870 fan, you will not have an issue adapting to the TAC-14.
Remington 870 Youth Model 25561 20 Gauge, $330	Feb. 2019	A-	Our Pick in a match up of youth models suitable for home defense. Ideal weight, a smooth action and trigger.
Mossberg Maverick 88 Youth Model 32202 20 Gauge, $198	Feb. 2019	B+	True youth model with a 12-inch LOP. Only 5.25 pounds. Fast-handling piece for the whole family.
H&R Pardner Youth Model NP1-2S1 20 Gauge, $165	Feb. 2019	B	Best Buy. Aiming rib was as good as the others, and the Pardner was easy enough to fire. Drilled and tapped.
Mossberg 590 Tactical Speed-feed 50665 12 Ga., $480	Oct. 2018	A	The 590 gave us confidence and was the only shotgun tested without any type of malfunction.
Remington 870 Express Tactical 81209 12 Ga., $729	Oct. 2018	A-	Good shotgun, but are all the 870 Tactical Magpul's features necessary for home defense? Maybe not.
Remington 870 DM Hardwood 81351 12 Gauge, $324	Oct. 2018	A-	The least-expensive shotgun tested, yet it may be the best suited for home-defense use.
JTS M12AK Semi-Auto 12 Gauge, $450	Oct. 2018	A-	Generally successful, but it does not handle as quickly as the conventional pump-action shotguns.
Mossberg 590M Mag-Fed Pump 50205 12 Ga., $530	Oct. 2018	D	The shotgun did not function as well as the Remington DM or the tube-feds. We would not buy this shotgun.
Mossberg 590 Shockwave 50659 12 Gauge, $455	Oct. 2017	A	Built to last. We'd opt for the OPSol Texas Mini-Clip and pack it with Aguila Mini Shells.
Remington 870P Standard 12 Gauge, $225	Sept. 2017	A	Best Buy. Patterns were good. Experimentation may find a load that does even better.
IAC (Norinco) Wild Bunch 12 Gauge, $300	Sept. 2017	B	Tactically, the design leaves some other shotguns in the dirt. It is fast to load and empty.
Mossberg 505 Youth Pump-Action 57110 20 Gauge, $300	Sept. 2017	A	The Mossberg 505 Youth is an overlooked gem. The fit wasn't bad for most raters.
Benelli Nova Tactical Pump 20051 12 Gauge, $372	Dec. 2016	A	Best Buy. Lockup is tight. Sights are among the best combat-style units. 10-year warranty.
Tristar TEC-12 No. 25120 Pump/Auto 12 Gauge, $557	Dec. 2016	A	Modern styling and handles just like the expensive Benelli M3.
Mossberg 930 Tactical 85320 12 Gauge, $514	Dec. 2016	A-	The 930 was the lightest kicker and had the highest magazine capacity.
IAC Imports Hawk Model 982 Defense 12 Gauge, $233	Oct. 2016	A	Among the least-expensive 12-gauge pumps we have tested. Never malfunctioned.
Remington M870 Express Syn. Tactical 12 Ga., $346	Oct. 2016	A	We liked the magazine capacity, and we will take the muzzle brake. Simple bead front sight.

A Look at Left-Hand Holsters: Picks for Southpaw Shooters

We test units from Hunter Co., Quest, Uncle Mike's, Swap Rig Holsters, Jason Winnie, Barber Leather Works, Blackhawk, 1791 Gun Leather, and Jeffrey Custom Leather.

After one of our last holster reviews, a GUN TESTS reader commented favorably on the article but remarked that many of the holsters were not available in left-hand models. As a southpaw, he mentioned several setbacks he had experienced in holster selection.

Here, then, we attempt to correct the problem by searching out left-hand, ambidextrous, and multi-purpose holsters and testing them thoroughly. We also look at the tactical implications of a right-handed person using a left-hand holster. It has been recognized that the self-defense shooter should be able to use the firearm at least reasonably well with the "off" side, so this is a viable tactical consideration.

The holster separates the gun from the body and also interfaces the gun to the body. Too many people spend a great deal of time choosing the handgun and ammunition, and very little effort is expended choosing the holster. A holster that doesn't fit the handgun well can be dangerous. A poorly fitting holster that flops on the belt is a chafing nuisance. The holster must balance speed and retention and concealment and access. More than one shooter has had his handgun slip out of the holster and hit the ground. This is a serious safety and legal concern. The holster should allow a rapid presentation from concealed carry without impediment.

A quality holster is about as expensive as a good pair of shoes, and we all know what poor footwear does — it doesn't last and makes your feet ache. For left-hand shooters, a one in five minority among shooters, the choice is a bit more difficult. Most, but not all, makers offer a left-hand option. Sometimes there is greater time involved in order to obtain the left-hand holster.



As you look at the holsters below, consider a couple of situations common to carry. For instance, when driving, a holster worn on the left side is more accessible due to the nature of seat-belt harnesses. Also, when you wear a gun, put your wallet on the other side of your body so your gun hand isn't involved in a lot of daily transactions. This is the A+-rated Jeffrey Custom Leather Ranger R Leather Lining/ Alligator Trim, $235.

As with any other holster, a left-hand model will present the firearm for a proper draw from concealed carry. The holster will feature a proper belt loop and attachment on the opposite face of the holster than for a right-hand holster. There are subtle differences in tilt and angle for the righty using a left-hand holster as a crossdraw unit, so it must be set up properly for that use.

For this test, our primary rater was a natural southpaw who learned to shoot right handed for practical reasons. He felt that it was an advantage for him to be born left-handed, and now he is more ambidextrous than most. He looked closely at the choices as a right-handed shooter who may wear a left-hand holster with a vertical or reverse cant and wear the holster near the back pocket and reach and complete the cavalry draw. Of course, the holster is also accessible to the left hand with this draw. Some carry modes depend on the situation you find yourself in at work in an at-risk environment and may work well for some.

Here's what we found when we compared several of these holsters:

Hunter Co. Inc. Snap Off Series 1100 Holster, $46

We found several versions of this holster on Brownells.com. We chose a model that accepts a snubnose 38 Special revolver. The Snap Off is a modernized Mexican loop in many ways. The design allows the holster to be slipped over the belt and hooked on

Hunter Co. Snap Off Series 1100





Hunter Co. Snap Off Series 1100

without threading the belt through the loop. This is more of a field holster than for concealed carry, but we have seen worse holsters used for personal defense. You can get by with some designs better for lightweight handguns that with heavy handguns.

The holster doesn't flop or shift as much as we thought, and the belt snap holds the revolver secure by looping over the hammer. This isn't ideal for concealed carry — just the same, there are fabric holsters that are far less secure. We felt this holster is pricey for what you get.

GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

Quest Ambidextrous Holster, $17

Purchased at an Academy Sports & Outdoors store, the Quest holster (OPIAmerica.com) is an interesting design. This is a fairly thick nylon holster rather than a floppy thin-fabric holster. The holster mouth and lip are well stitched. The holster features a magazine carrier. While some prefer a separate magazine carrier, when the Quest-design carrier isn't in use, the magazine compartment lays flat against the holster, so it's no impediment to concealed carry. The one-size-fits-all holster doesn't fit all handguns well, but it accommodated a Glock 45 9mm and SIG P229 9mm well. A Glock 48 wallowed in the holster. There are several gun-specific models listed on the company's website that may serve better.

Quest Ambidextrous Holster



A security strap is centrally located and may be wrapped over the hammer or grip strap of the handgun to maintain security. As one of the raters pointed out, the holster may be worn on the belt, but it is more secure if worn between the belt and the pants. The spine is pretty stiff.

There are better holsters out there, but for the money, the Quest could help a new gun buyer by offering something to use until he can order a better holster. We rated it down on fit and speed.

GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

Barber Leather Works Chameleon, $30

This holster is a neat trick, according to the rater's consensus. Made by BarberLeatherworks.com, it is ambidextrous and is offered in two sizes. It is intended to "tide the shooter" over until he or she receives a true custom holster. With a handgun that fits well and slips deep into the holster, the draw angle is compromised to an extent. But it does succeed as a stopgap. It is more secure than many fabric holsters. The leatherwork is good, as is the stitching. On the rear face of the holster are two belt slots. The result is a long tunnel loop. This makes for good security and a tight fit on a proper gun belt. The Chameleon is equally at home on either hip. When the holster is worn as an outside-the-waistband unit, the belt clip is exposed. If worn as an inside-the-waistband holster, we felt that it is more secure. A short-slide handgun such as the Glock 43 works best with this holster. The belt clip is strong and takes a good bite on the belt. We rated it an A not because it is the greatest concealed-carry holster but because it fills a real need and does what it is designed to do.



Barber Chameleon Holsters

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Jason Winnie Little Problem Solver, $30

Available on JasonWinnie.com, as the name implies this holster is intended to solve problems in concealed carry while you are waiting for your custom holster to be delivered, or perhaps if you own a handgun that is difficult to fit or there are no molds available. This holster takes some study to

Winnie Little Problem Solver



appreciate. The outside of the holster is smooth and well finished. The holster body has a leather attachment sewn on. This leather attachment isn't going anywhere; it is very sturdy. The belt loops and belt clip are on the same piece of leather. The side of the holster facing the body is slightly thicker leather. The holster is at home on either side of the body, either as a belt slide or as an inside-the-waistband holster, the latter being where it works better. The Problem Solver earns its name.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Swap Rig Holsters Cargo Pack2, $40

Available on SwapRigHolsters.com, this holster is intended to hold a pocket pistol or backup handgun in cargo shorts or pants pockets. It works well. It is an ambidextrous design and is also adjustable. Dialing the adjustment screw allows the tightness of the holster to maintain its hold on small handguns to the level you desire.

We tested a snubnose 38, a Colt 1903 32, and a Ruger LCP 380. The holster works well and offers a fast draw and good stability. This is a special-purpose holster that's better than a standard pocket holster for crews pants or those who deploy crews-type trousers. It is the best pocket holster for either right- or left-hand use and for weak-side use by a shooter who uses either hand. It offers a lot of utility for the dollar.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A



Swap Rig Cargo Pack

Blackhawk! Ambi Flat Belt Holster 40FB02BK, $18

We found this on the website Quartermaster.com. This is a neat little belt slide that cinches up tight on the belt. The supple fabric will tighten against the body as tightly as the belt will allow. There is a retention strap that is attached to a Velcro tab on either side of the belt slide. It is an ambidextrous holster. The belt slide works well for handguns that fit properly. We tried several Glock and SIG pistols, and while much of the slide protrudes, this one seems plenty tight against the body, with less chance of a slip up. As a belt slide, this is a neat and useful holster equally suited for left- or right-side carry. Some raters would not consider it without the safety strap





Blackhawk! Flat Belt Holster

in place; others would. It depends on the gun and retention.

GUN TESTS GRADE: B

Uncle Mike's Sidekick Hip Holster 81152, $14

We found this holster online at EagleEye.com for $14 to $24 and at the local Walmart and Academy Sports for an average of $14 to $16. Uncle Mike's and the Sidekick have been around a long time. This is an improved version compared to the Uncle Mike's holsters tested in the past. This is a true left-handed holster — it isn't ambidextrous. This is a size 5, which covers a





Uncle Mike's Sidekick Hip Holster

variety of handguns. Glock, Beretta, SIG, and Ruger are listed. We found it a good, tight fit for the Glock 45 9mm and also the SIG 1911 45. The SIG has the distinctive P-series profile and isn't the easiest to find a holster for. The Sidekick is a range and field holster in our judgment, but it could serve under a covering garment. The belt loops cinch up tightly to a proper gun belt. The main impediment for concealed carry is that fit isn't tight enough for carry without a retention device. The strap works fine, but you have to get your fingers up and under the tap to unsnap it. There is not overhang for easy access. Just the same, for less than $15, this is a holster with good stitching and reinforced spine that holds its shape.

GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

Jeffrey Custom Leather Ranger R Leather Lining/ Alligator Trim, $235

This was priced at $155 for the Ranger R holster with leather lining,

available on JeffreyCustomLeather.com. Add $80 for the alligator trim. Most custom makers advertise a



Jeffrey Custom Leather Ranger R Leather Lining/ Alligator Trim

wait of three to six weeks, but Jeffrey Custom Leather is usually ahead of the game for this delivery. Such a wait is realistic considering the work and effort that goes into such a holster. We ordered our Ranger R for the Colt Detective Special. Because one of the raters has been wanting such a holster for some time, he popped for the alligator trim. While alligator is very rugged and will protect the gun and the shooter for many years, is it a vanity more than a needed upgrade? Only the user may make that decision. Fit is excellent. It took some effort to shove the revolver into the holster. After wearing the handgun holstered a few days, the break-in resulted in excellent speed. The hand goes to the holster and a quick tug brings the revolver into action. Retention is excellent, and so is the balance between speed and retention. The Ranger R design features a wing over the holster body that cinches the handgun close into the body, giving the best possible concealment for an OWB holster. The holster was also worn on the back near the right kidney to test its use for special chores with a right-hand draw. It worked well. The Ranger R is arguably one of the finest holsters we have tested, making it an excellent all-round choice for concealed carry. Left-handed shooters need not despair for a custom holster.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A+ (Our Pick)

Blackhawk! Sportster Holster ~$18

Bought on DEGuns.net, we found a range of prices for the Blackhawk! holster. Any price around $20 is more than fair. At first glance, the Blackhawk! and Uncle Mike's holsters appear similar, but in hands-on testing, the Blackhawk! is much more versatile. We ordered the Blackhawk! size 02 for medium and large double-action revolvers with around an inch-thick barrel to give the test more depth. The K-frame Combat Masterpiece 4-inch is a good fit in this holster, and so is the L-frame 586. Possible long use with the 586 would stretch the holster too much for use with the smaller K-frame, so be advised about that possibility. The Sportster is ambidextrous with a sewn-on belt loop on each side of the holster. A strong spine at the front of the holster keeps the holster solid. It does not collapse when the handgun is drawn. The holster is supplied with a thumb-break plastic retention strap that works okay. There is a small plastic ruler supplied that allows the user to break contact between the retention straps and the Velcro holding them. You may not need the straps if using the holster as an inside-the-waistband holster. There is a steel clip supplied — it was set up for left-hand use as delivered — that allows using the holster as an inside-the-waistband type. The plastic ruler may be used to change the belt clip from side to side. It is a bit of a chore, but then it is very secure when in place.

We tested the holster primarily as an IWB. It worked well. We also used the holster for right-hand draw in the cavalry style. This is placing the holster in the belt as a left-hand holster. The hand reaches to draw the gun and then twists it forward. The larger butt of a revolver lies against the body in this draw. We gained some concealment and lost some speed in the draw. Using the Sportster on either side, we find it to be a useful and viable product. This holster is inexpensive, but



Blackhawk! Sportster

we cannot call it cheap. For those owning several firearms, this is a resource that is good to have. The semi-auto versions have a magazine pouch on the spines.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (Best Buy)

1791 Gun Leather 3 Way Multi-fit OWB Concealment Holster, $48

Available on the company website at 1791GunLeather.com, the 3 Way holster may be worn strong side, crossdraw, or small of the back. Small of the back is the least-favored draw of most of the raters. It was designed to get the gun and holster on the belt and concealed under a short covering garment, for those who have a difficult time acclimating to an inside-the-waistband holster. It works and works well for that, but the draw is bent wrist, not ideal. The holster must be tightly fitted to make small-of-back-carry (SOB) viable. We ordered



1791 Gun Leather 3 Way Multi-fit OWB Concealment Holster

the holster in Stealth Black. The fit and finish were good and the stitching credible. On each face of the holster, a leather component is sewn on, each with three belt loops. One set offers strong-side or crossdraw carry and the others SOB carry.

The raters really like the crossdraw option. The holster is tight against the belt, but height wise, there is just enough movement to adjust the draw angle of the holster for strong-side or crossdraw modes, and it stays in place. We like the versatility of this holster. It works equally well for right- or left-hand use in strong-side carry and also works well in crossdraw. As for SOB carry, we like it as well as any other small-of-the-back unit, which isn't much, but it works.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

1791 Gun Leather Open Top Revolver Holster, $53

Also available on the website 1791GunLeather.com, this is a well-executed, excellent design. We were surprised that this one was in stock and was delivered so quickly. The work is custom grade. The stitching is good, and the end of the line of the stitching is blocked to prevent unraveling. The rear face of the holster features excellent double stitching. This maintains the blocking and fit of the handgun in the holster. Yet, this is off the rack for the maker. The leather is high quality and edging is well done.



1791 Gun Leather Open Top Revolver Holster

Fit is good and requires a modest break in before you realize your best speed. Note the belt loops are tight and feature a slight indent on the side closest to the handgun to allow the belt to glide in and cinch up tight. This is an impressive holster on every count, especially for the price.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

1791 Gunleather SCH Multi Fit IWB, $44

Available on the website, the Smooth Concealment Holster (SCH) is made of breathable supple steer hide, the maker claims. This one is finished in Night Sky Black. The holster is designed to fit Glock 17 and Glock 19 types as well as



1791 Gun Leather SCH

a range of SIG and Springfield models and, surprisingly, the CZ 75 as well. We found the holster to be well stitched and blocked, although some expense was saved by not double stitching the holster. A leather rectangle is sewn into the face of the body to attach the spring-steel belt clip. We liked this holster. It wears well, it is comfortable, and it features a sweat guard. The holster mouth closes when the gun is drawn. This isn't ideal. The Glock 19 was a tight fit for this holster. The Glock 48, is a perfect fit, so sizing is on the tight side.

GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

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— *continued from page 31*

Blackhawk! ARC IWB/AWB, $23

Available on the website Blackhawk.com, this plastic holster is affordable and well designed. Injection-molded polymer construction is used. The ARC is thinner than Kydex but worked fine during testing. The ARC is adjustable for cant and ride height. Depending on the clothing, you may wish the holster to ride deeper for concealment, while the higher ride offers a sharp draw. The holster is fully ambidextrous. This holster isn't rigid like Kydex, and it does flex, but not collapse, after the handgun is drawn. And it costs around $23.

As a left-hand holster, the Appendix Reversible Carry works well. All appendix holsters have a certain amount of roll out due to the design, but the ARC is less offensive than most. This is a good piece of gear that is well work the money. We rated it down a half grade on the thin construction.



Blackhawk! ARC IWB/AWB

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

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

COMING UP IN GUN TESTS

- The majority of new concealed-carry permit holders are choosing capable handguns. Few are the 25 ACP or 32 ACP of yesteryear. Instead, an increasingly popular choice is the slimline 9mm, which is rewriting the rules of concealed carry due to new ammunition developments. Tested: the Bond Arms Bullpup 9, Beretta APX Carry JAXN920, and the Ruger LC9s Engraved Slide.

- Military replica rifles chambered in 22 LR, round one: The GSG StG44, Chiappa Arms M1 Carbine, HK/Carl Walther MP5 A5, and the Carl Walther Colt M4.

- 357 Magnum Revolvers: The N-frame Smith & Wesson Classic Model 27 six-shooter, the K-frame Taurus 66, a seven-shooter, and the Taurus big-frame stainless 608, an eight-shooter.

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