# GUN TESTS®

THE CONSUMER RESOURCE FOR THE SERIOUS SHOOTER

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## 357 MAGNUM REVOLVERS

**Tested: Smith & Wesson's Classic Model 27, the Taurus Model 66, and the Taurus Model 608 stainless. All three handle the powerful handgun cartridge, but two stand out. Find out which ones on...** **● Page 6**

*357 MAGNUM VALUE GUIDE: PAGE 14*






## POPULAR CARRY HANDGUNS

**Tested: The Ruger LC9s Engraved Slide, Beretta APX Carry, and the Bond Arms Bullpup 9, a new and improved rendition of the Boberg 9mm pistol. All ran reliably, but we preferred two. Find out the winners on...** **● Page 15**

*9MM LUGER PISTOL VALUE GUIDE: PAGE 24*



## .410-BORE SHOTGUNS

**The surprisingly effective small-bore shotshell finds a good home in a single shot from Savage/Stevens, a Mossberg pumpgun, and a stylish semi-auto from TriStar. Check out which shotgun wins on...** **● Page 25**


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# DOWNRANGE

## I BELIEVE THEM



*Todd Woodard*

One of the issues gun owners face is whom to believe when politicians stake out policy positions on gun controls they would implement if they are elected to higher office. You and I both know politicians lie about such things, so we tend to dismiss the rantings of anti-gun campaigners and say, "It can't happen here, 2nd Amendment, mumble mumble." But when I see a politician campaigning to limit my gun rights, *I believe them.* Here are some recent statements of policy by several politicians that I absolutely, positively believe they would implement if given the power to do so:

**Former Rep. Beto O'Rourke of Texas, Democrat candidate for president in 2020:** "That's why, as president, I would institute a mandatory buyback of every assault weapon in America." (*USA Today*, August 22, 2019)

**Senator (D-NJ) and Democrat presidential hopeful Cory Booker:** "Beginning on Day One in office, I will take executive action to reduce gun violence — closing dangerous loopholes in gun sales, cracking down on gun manufacturers, and investing in communities impacted by gun violence." (@CoryBooker tweet, August 31, 2019)

**Joe Biden, Democrat presidential front-runner and former vice president, defending the effects of the 1994 crime bill:** "I'm the only guy ever nationally to beat the NRA. Because when we did the crime bill — everybody talks about the bad things. Let me tell you about the good thing in the crime bill. It's the one that had the assault weapons ban, a limited number of bullets in a clip. It made sure that cop-killer bullets, Teflon bullets, weren't available any longer. It opened up the whole effort to make sure there is background checks for the first time in American history." (Fox News, May 15, 2019)

**Democrat presidential hopeful Kamala Harris, senator (D-CA) and former California attorney general and San Francisco district attorney:** "I'm announcing for the first time today here with you to take executive action to ban the import of assault weapons into our country." (*Washington Examiner*, May 15, 2019

There are many other examples from other politicians, but that's all I can fit in this space this time. But I'll keep you informed about the latest political statements on the Gun Tests Facebook page. **GT**

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# Lefties Sound Off on Holsters

*Reader Murrell likes the look of the Blackhawk ARC, but not the gun fit. Reader Brendan shows how to enjoy a good* Gun Tests *read in style and comfort. And Reader Paul mixed shooting and sparking well.*

**Re "A Look at Left-Hand Holsters: Picks for Southpaw Shooters," September 2019**



Just grabbed the issue out of the box, saw the ARC Holster and review. Stood there and read it. Just knew I had to have one. Got online and realized that the body side of the holster does not come up enough to cover the gun. Ergo, body-to-gun direct contact. Not good any time, but very bad in the summertime. For now, I will keep using my Concealment Express Kydex. I am sure it is almost as thin and keeps my grease and sweat off my pistol. **— Murrell**

Hi, as a left-hander, I was very happy to see the holster article in the September magazine. I saw that the article listed one as an advantage in a vehicle. To me, that sounds good whether left- or right-handed! A paddle holster is quick and easy to put on or take off. However, no paddle holsters were surveyed. Are there any left-handed paddle holsters? I don't want to modify my car, for looks and resale value. I could take my pocket pistol, put it in a paddle holster in the car, and back into my pocket outside the car! Are there no left-handed paddle holsters? **— Bill**

*Thanks for reading! Glad you enjoyed the article. Galco has several paddle holsters, and they have a left-hand option in the dropdown bar when ordering. DeSantis as well. I have not used paddles as I do not like the ease with which the holster is grabbed from the body, and also that some shift more than I like. However, both are related to my previous police experience. Oddly enough, for civilians the paddle is a much better choice. — Bob Campbell*

**Suppressor Advice**

I have been searching the archived issues to get answers about suppressors. I currently have one that I purchased for a CZ 22 LR rifle. I have two questions. Can I use this suppressor on my .223 rifle? And, can I use my current tax stamp to purchase another suppressor, or do I have to do all the paperwork and pay $200 for each new one I get? Just renewed for another two years. Keep the faith. **— Father Charles**

*Father: Rimfire suppressors aren't rated for the higher pressures of centerfire rounds. So don't use it on your .223. And yes, you have to have a tax stamp for each and every device. — Todd Woodard*

**Re "Shooting a Pistol Is Simple... Tips for Better Marksmanship," August 2019**

Dear Mr. Woodard: I have been reading Gun Tests articles for many years, and I enjoy the objective and thorough comparisons of firearms. I particularly enjoyed the article, "Shooting a pistol is simple." The article was well written and analytical, going through the steps

**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.



**Reader Brendan shows us how to enjoy GUN TESTS in comfort.**

to be competent with a firearm, as well as being easy to read/follow. I appreciate you bringing in firearm experts who have the ability to write interesting and useful articles. I always look forward to receiving the next month's magazine.

**— Michael**

As a former Marine, "outstanding" is not a word I use lightly or loosely. However, Joe Woolley's article on pistol shooting was truly outstanding. It was, as they say, "spot on." I have been shooting the M1911 for over 50 years now and rediscovered from the article that, even at my age, there are still ways to improve. Joe did an exceptional job of explaining the difference between procedures and techniques. When I was a helicopter flight instructor, I repeatedly told my students that, even though procedures should all be the same, techniques vary greatly, they should try them all and select the one(s) that work best for them. Only one caveat..., when flying, you DO NOT grip the cyclic hard. Thanks for the article. I look forward to more by Joe. **— G.W.**

My August 2019 issue contained 5 (five) pages of wasted space regarding how to (allegedly) shoot a handgun. I subscribe to GUN TESTS magazine to read about gun tests (can you blame me?). If you are going to include other areas outside of testing firearms, please stick to the subject and test reloading equipment, ammunition, different sighting systems, etc. I don't subscribe to your magazine to read blather on legal opinions (which might not apply in my jurisdiction) or how to (supposedly) shoot. In other words, stay in your lane. Please "get it" or my long time subscription might "get gone."

**— Duane**

Greetings, I thought your article about shooting handguns was outstanding. How you show to grip a semi-auto is how I was shown, but I see most people do not grip this way. I found my accuracy was much better using the grip you illustrated. I would really like to see a test on the Tikka T3X Lite in 308 Win. I feel it is being overlooked. I know of two that shoot half-inch groups out of the box with Federal soft-point ammo. Keep up your outstanding work. **— Perry**

What a great article by Joe Woolley in the August edition. His article is a complete review of everything I have experienced shooting a pistol for the last 25 years. It's a must read for all potential pistol shooters and a complete review for long-time shooters. Great work, Mr. Woolley!

**— WTM**

I enjoyed the Special Report on "Shooting a Pistol Is Simple." I too believe in dry firing. I was all over the target when I first starting shooting. Then I bought a Laser Grip. Dry firing at home with the laser, aimed at photos on the wall, and sometimes at the TV, taught me trigger control. I draw, aim with the sights, then I add a little more pressure with my middle finger. That turns on the laser to see if I'm using the sights correctly. Then I pull the trigger through on my double-action revolver. At first, the laser was wiggling all over the wall. With the laser feedback, I quickly mastered it. When I got back to the range I started eating holes in the target! What a difference. I don't depend on the laser for defense because most of the time you can't see it in the bright Arizona sun. I practice with my sights at the range. The laser is a great learning tool and would be a great help when the light is right. **— Bill**

*I do realize our franchise is about honestly testing firearms and accessories themselves, so we don't venture out of our lane, as Reader Duane mentioned, very often. But as in the case of an article about legal use of firearms in self defense several years ago (Michele Byington), how to choose a legal self-defense plan (Gordon Cooper), and most recently on handgun shooting technique (Joe Woolley), the topics bear strongly on the proper use and enjoyment of firearms, so they seem germane. Also, readers responded strongly to these occasional non-product topics by reading them much more often than other content on Gun-Tests.com. — tw*

### What About These Rifles?

Hi, I've been a subscriber for the past year or two. I have a question: Have you ever evaluated either of the following two rifles: Browning X-Bolt or Tikka T3X? If so, in which issues (month & year) were the reviews? Thanks for any help.

**— Dave**

*Hey Dave: We have evaluated the X-Bolt on a couple of occasions. In the February 2017 issue, we reviewed the Browning X-Bolt Micro Midas No. 035346209 22-250 Remington, which got a B+. "Our Team Said: We can't believe we're complaining about a 1.1-MOA rifle, especially when it covered all the bases our test team had openly expressed. The Micro Midas is a bolt-action rifle that fits into a small space, was fast into action, cycled quickly even*

*when top loaded, and didn't beat us up. Given the overall package and the visual appeal, we think it's worth the time to test more factory ammunition or develop a handload to break the 1-MOA barrier in this rifle."*

*Further back in the March 2009 issue, we tested a Browning X-Bolt Medallion No. 035200224 270 Win. We said, "The Browning X-Bolt's performance was astonishingly good. It shot all three of our test ammunitions superbly, displaying tighter-than-MOA performance with everything we fed it, despite less-than-ideal range conditions. The Browning averaged about 0.6-inch groups center-to-center with the Stars & Stripes loads, 0.8-inch clusters with the Hornadys, and 0.9-inch groups with the Cor-Bons—one of the most accurate production 270 Winchester hunting rifles we have tested." It earned an A grade.*

*We've tested a Tikka T3 Lite in 300 WSM in the March 2008 issue, but not the T3X. It earned an A+, and "Bottom line, we liked this rifle a lot. Everything about the rifle was pretty good, we thought. The light weight, the ease of mounting our Nitrex 3-9X scope in the rings provided, the fine trigger pull, the slick magazine, smooth bolt and smooth feeding, perfect function in all respects, the great price, and not the least, the fine performance of the .300 WSM in this rifle made us think that if we wanted a .300 magnum, this would be it." — tw*

**Re "6mm Creedmoor Bolt-Actions: Barrett, Browning, and Howa," August 2019**

Yeah, I'm an old dog (70 years young) who has been shooting even before I learned properly from the "old" Boy Scouts in the early 1960s. But I do not understand the hoopla about these "new" 6mm and 6.5mm loadings and what benefits they offer over my tried-and-true 243 Win. with 85-grain and 100-grain Sierra boattail bullets zooming out at nearly 3000 fps and highly accurate as well. Mine has been scoped out with a pre-1980 Leupold 6.5-20 adjustable for range (parallax). Early on, I have used the 85-grain bullet on groundhogs out to 400 yards and the 100-grain bullet on deer with success. Plus, as you have spoken of, go try and find this new ammo in the countryside. I can always find the 243 at a lower price and even reload my rounds with an old Lee hand press.

Get this, my second date with my future wife was out to Lancaster County, PA in 1980 to shoot groundhogs and have lunch, which was country-fried chicken and chicken corn soup. I wanted to see if she "liked" the experience. She loved the food and loved shooting the 243, so I married her 37 years ago, and we still shoot clays together on Sundays. **— Paul**

*Hey Paul: The very-low-drag bullets in the 6mm Creedmoor and 6.5 Creedmoor offer better performance at longer ranges. The .243 Win. case has a slightly larger capacity, but the Creeds are loaded to higher pressures, so they get slightly better velocities. For you, however, try some of the commercial .243 loads with longer bullets, such as Hornady's ELD-X, or try some of the longer bullets in your handloads after carefully consulting a suitable loading manual. Your barrel's twist rate will also need to be figured in. — tw*

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

# Magnum Revolvers: 6-, 7-, and 8-Shooters from Taurus, S&W

*We test three 357 Magnum revolvers with different capacities for personal defense. We liked the Taurus revolvers the best, with the Model 66 and Model 608 hitting like heavyweights. So which won?*

The 357 Magnum revolver was introduced in 1935, first chambered in a big-frame revolver. When the handgun was introduced, it cost about $65. Yes, that's cheap at first glance, but a new car was less than a thousand dollars, and a good-quality 38 Special, 1911, or single-action revolver was available for $35. The Magnum offered sensational performance with twice the energy of the 38 Special. Penetration gave lawmen a handgun that would penetrate vehicles, and outdoorsmen had a handgun that would kill large game with a single shot. Perhaps some of the game taken with the Magnum was a bit of a stunt, but then a good shot may work wonders with a deep-penetrating bullet. Eventually, the 357 Magnum was chambered in lighter revolvers, including the Smith & Wesson Model 19 Combat Magnum. This revolver is basically a 38 Special with a lengthened and heat-treated cylinder. All 357 Magnums have the option of using 38 Special ammunition for training and practice. The consensus was that a K-frame revolver should be fired with twenty 38s for every Magnum cartridge. Small-frame revolvers do not crack frames, but they do crack forcing cones and small parts take a beating. For heavy use, a larger-frame revolver, like those tested here is preferred.

We tested three revolvers from Smith & Wesson and Taurus with slightly different configurations, but all with 4-inch barrels. They were the:

- *Smith & Wesson Classic Model 27 150339*, an N-frame six shooter, the
- *Taurus Model 66 2-660041* K-frame, a seven shooter, and the
- *Taurus Model 608 2-608049*, a big-frame stainless eight shooter.

Over time, the 357 Magnum has gone from an expensive specialist's revolver to everyman's magnum, and there's a range of choices to pick from in materials,



Smith & Wesson Model 27



Taurus Model 66



Taurus Model 608

**All three of the revolvers have merit. We looked hard at the build strength of each because these are 357 Magnum revolvers, and handloaders are often enthusiastic about their powder charges, to say the least. The six-shot Smith & Wesson M27 cylinder, top, is 1.46 inches wide. Middle, the Taurus M66 cylinder is 1.37 inches wide, while the Taurus 608 cylinder, bottom, is 1.54 inches wide. Both the Model 27 Classic and the Taurus 608 have bolt stops cut over the cylinder. The Taurus 608 cylinder is 1.51 inches long, compared to 1.39 inches for the Model 27. Because the Taurus 608 is basically a 44 Magnum redesigned to handle eight 357 Magnum cartridges, this makes sense. The Taurus 608 may be the better choice for heavy handloads that use 180- to 200-grain cast bullets because short cylinders sometimes do not accommodate a handload loaded to the required length.**

## 38 SPECIAL/357 MAGNUM RANGE DATA

| **Remington Wheelgun 38 Special 158-grain LSW** | **Smith & Wesson Model 27** | **Taurus Model 608** | **Taurus Model 66** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average Velocity | 743 fps | 770 fps | 760 fps |
| Muzzle Energy | 193 ft.-lbs. | 207 ft.-lbs. | 203 ft.-lbs. |
| Small Group | 1.7 in. | 2.0 in. | 2.3 in. |
| Average Group | 1.8 in. | 2.2 in. | 2.5 in. |
| **Hornady 357 Magnum 125-grain XTP 90504** | **Smith & Wesson Model 27** | **Taurus Model 608** | **Taurus Model 66** |
| Average Velocity | 1359 fps | 1411 fps | 1370 fps |
| Muzzle Energy | 512 ft.-lbs. | 552 ft.-lbs. | 520 ft. lbs. |
| Small Group | 1.3 in. | 1.8 in. | 2.0 in. |
| Average Group | 1.5 in. | 2.0 in. | 2.2 in. |
| **Black Hills Factory New 158-grain JHP** | **Smith & Wesson Model 27** | **Taurus Model 608** | **Taurus Model 66** |
| Average Velocity | 1170 fps | 1190 fps | 1156 fps |
| Muzzle Energy | 480 ft.-lbs. | 496 ft.-lbs. | 468 ft.-lbs. |
| Small Group | 1.2 in. | 1.8 in. | 2.2 in. |
| Average Group | 1.4 in. | 2.2 in. | 2.4 in. |

*All groups were fired from a Bullshooter gun rest off a bench. The groups were fired in three strings of five shots for each load in each handgun. Velocity was recorded with an RCBS Ammomaster Chronograph at 10 yards. Ammo was all from MidwayUSA.com: Remington Wheelgun 38 Special 158-grain lead semi-wadcutter ($23.94/50); Black Hills Ammunition Factory New 158-grain Jacketed Hollow Point ($40.90/50); Hornady 357 Magnum 125-grain XTP ($18/25).*

barrel length, sights, and other options. These big-frame revolvers take a beating and keep going, but are sometimes slower from the holster and not as fast to get on target. But because of their weight and frame size, they are usually controllable in rapid fire. The new design large-frame revolvers also may be chambered for seven or eight magnums, and there is also a wider range of choices in handgun grips. Here's how we thought these particular wheelguns fared when fired side by side at the range:

### Smith & Wesson Model 27 Classic 150339 38 Special/357 Magnum, $909

This was our price at BudsGunShop.com. We ordered the Model 27 Classic with a 4-inch barrel. Even with the shorter barrel length, the piece tipped the scales at 44.5 ounces. This substantial weight results in an excellent balance and heightened comfort when firing full-power loads. The Model 27 was easily the most comfortable revolver to fire with hard-kicking loads. The revolver features a very nice blued finish, evenly applied, dark and faultless.

The Model 27 Classic features grips that are checkered and which feature the Smith & Wesson emblem in a small insert. Unlike most modern Smith & Wesson revolvers, which feature a round-butt frame that may be turned into a square butt with adaptor grips, the N-frame Model 27 features a true square




**Our test ammos included, top, Hornady 357 Magnum 125-grain XTPs, which generated the highest energies in the test, top. Middle: Remington Wheelgun 38 Special 158-grain lead semi-wadcutters produced their best accuracy in the Smith & Wesson Model 27. The Black Hills Ammunition Factory New 158-grain Jacketed Hollow Points shot the best groups in the test in the S&W, bottom.**

## SMITH & WESSON MODEL 27 CLASSIC 150339 38 SPECIAL +P/357 MAGNUM, $909

## GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

**The fit and finish of this handgun are flawless. Accuracy from the benchrest was very good. The grips are very attractive, but they are not the best design for handling magnum loads and during double-action fire. The trigger action was the big problem, very heavy.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action | Single/Double Action |
| Overall Length | 9.3 in. |
| Overall Height | 5.5 in. |
| Maximum Width (Cylinder) | 1.7 in. |
| Weight Unloaded | 41.0 oz. |
| Weight Loaded | 44.0 oz. |
| Barrel | 4.0 in. long, blue carbon steel |
| Capacity | 6 |
| Frame | Blue carbon steel, large frame |
| Cylinder | Blue carbon steel, fluted |
| Front Strap Height | 2.5 in. |
| Rear Strap Height | 3.8 in. |
| Grips | Checkered wood |
| Grip Thickness (Max) | 1.0 in. |
| Grip Circumference (Max) | 5.0 in. |
| Front Sight | Pinned Serrated Ramp |
| Rear Sight | Adjustable |
| Sight Radius | 5.7 in. |
| Trigger Pull Weight Double Action | 16.0 lbs. |
| Trigger Pull Weight Single Action | 6.0 lbs. |
| Trigger Span Single Action | 3.0 in. |
| Trigger Span Double Action | 3.5 in. |
| Safety | None |
| Warranty | Lifetime |
| Telephone | (800) 331-0852 |
| Website | Smith-Wesson.com |
| Made In | USA |



**The Model 27 Classic is a good-looking revolver with a businesslike appearance. The fit and finish of this revolver are outstanding. The big-frame revolvers were the easiest on the hand in recoil. 38 Special rounds were creampuffs.**



**Above: The grips are a bit thin for a full size revolver. Grips on the Taurus handguns felt a lot better when using full-spec magnums.**



**The front post may be changed if needed. The pin (arrow) holds the post in place. The serrated ramp offered a good sight picture on most targets.**



**The trigger face is wide and serrated. While the Smith & Wesson Model 27 was comfortable to fire, it was limited by a heavy trigger action.**



**We like the fully adjustable rear sight. It is secured by a larger screw than previous revolvers, another good change.**



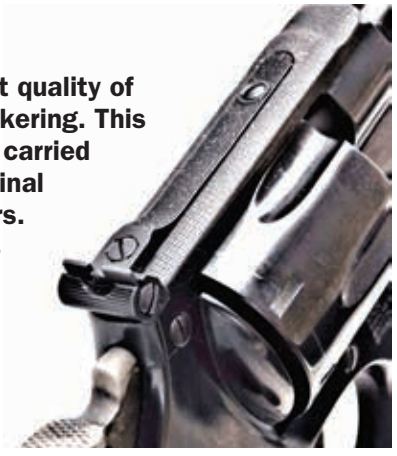
**When the Smith revolver arrived, there was corrosion in the serial number. This didn't affect the handgun's function, so we picked out the rust and filled it up and shot it.**



**Right: The Galco Combat Master provided excellent results during the test. The balance of speed and retention is ideal for these large revolvers.**



**Right: The Smith & Wesson Model 27 fired this group, off hand standing, at 15 yards. It is an accurate handgun.**



**Note the excellent quality of the topstrap checkering. This is another aspect carried over from the original Model 27 revolvers. We really like this addition to the revolver.**

butt. The top strap is nicely checkered, the same as original Model 27 revolvers. We really like this addition to the revolver. The fully adjustable sights are excellent. They are secured by a larger screw than previous revolvers, another good change. The front ramp sight offers a good sight picture. There are several departures from the earlier Model 27. The revolver features the new floating firing pin, but it isn't a transfer-bar system. The barrel is the modern two-piece type, and the Model 27 features an action lock. While we debated the accuracy of these features on a Classic revolver, they are what they are. The safety lock did not hinder us, and the two-piece barrel provided exceptional accuracy. This is simply a barrel with a shroud over the inner tube. The hammer and trigger are the wide target style, with a checkered hammer spur and serrated trigger face. The sideplate features a fourth screw in the manner that was discontinued in Model 27 production about 1955. This is a nice touch that adds to the Classic appearance. The Model 27 is a nicely finished and well-turned-out handgun. In appearance, it is flawless. At least, at first glance.

When our FFL logged the gun in, he opened the cylinder and wrote the serial number down in his log book. The serial number was covered with corrosion. Bluing salts left over, or poor storage? We have no idea, and although he offered to send it back, we kept the Model 27. A small amount of rust in this spot doesn't affect function, and otherwise, the revolver was perfectly acceptable in appearance. We carefully removed the small flecks of rust with a dental pick.

We were surprised, in a negative way, when we tried the double-action trigger. We have tried several modern L-frame revolvers and found good, smooth trigger actions. The Model 27 featured the heaviest double-action trigger action of any Smith & Wesson revolver we can recall. We estimated 20 pounds — it was off the scale of our trigger gauges. The single-action press felt very good, but was also heavy at 6 pounds even. We dry-fired the Smith & Wesson 100 times, and, frankly, it was tiring. There were no hard spots or gritty movement, simply weight. We placed lubricant in the action and dry fired in relays to the tune of 250 cycles. The revolver still did not smooth with use.

The revolvers were fired for combat accuracy first. Notably, the Smith & Wesson could be fully loaded eight times from a box of 50 cartridges with two left over, the Taurus M66, seven times with one left over, and the Taurus 608, six times with two left over. We used the Black Hills Ammunition 38 Special 158-grain rounds first, firing 50 rounds, and the Remington 158-grain lead SWC 357 Magnum 50 rounds as well. Velocity of the 38 Special load was 770 fps, and 1215 fps average for the Magnum load.

We found the Model 27 was comfortable to fire. The sights made for good accuracy. However, the

## TAURUS MODEL 66 2-660041 38 SPECIAL/357 MAGNUM, $371

## GUN TESTS GRADE: A

**A capable performer. The only medium-frame revolver tested, the Model 66 is well suited to personal defense and home defense, and would make a good field gun for protection against animals. It is suitable for concealed carry with proper load selection.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action | Single/Double Action |
| Overall Length | 8.8 in. |
| Overall Height | 10.5 in. |
| Maximum Width (Cylinder) | 1.4 in. |
| Weight Unloaded | 38.0 oz. |
| Weight Loaded | 41.0 oz. |
| Barrel Length | 4.0 in. |
| Capacity | 7 |
| Frame | Carbon steel, medium |
| Cylinder Material | Steel |
| Front Strap Height | 3.0 in. |
| Rear Strap Height | 4.5 in. |
| Grips | Rubber, pebbled |
| Grip Thickness (Max) | 1.1 in. |
| Grip Circumference (Max) | 5.0 in. |
| Front Sight | Fixed post |
| Rear Sight | Adjustable |
| Sight Radius | 6.0 in. |
| Trigger Pull Weight Single Action | 6.0 lbs. |
| Trigger Pull Weight Double Action | 10.25 lbs. |
| Trigger Span Single Action | 3.15 in. |
| Trigger Span Double Action | 3.5 in. |
| Safety | Transfer bar |
| Warranty | Lifetime |
| Telephone | (800) 327-3776 |
| Website | TaurusUSA.com |
| Made In | Brazil |







**Left: This is a workmanlike finish on the M66, and good, snug fit (arrow). The Taurus 66 is a no-frills, no-polish revolver. Middle arrow: Note the extra lockup point on the crane. Right arrow: Note the tight cylinder gap. The revolvers were surprisingly controllable with Magnum loads, shooters said.**



**The M66 hammer is nicely checkered. Pulling it to the rear prior to shooting created a reasonably good single-action trigger pull of 6.0 pounds. The Taurus 66 was hands down the smoothest revolver. The Taurus 66 is also available in stainless steel. It may be an even better choice in stainless.**



**Above: The smooth trigger worked well in double-action fire. Despite its light weight, the Taurus 66 wasn't difficult to use well. Combat accuracy was good with the Taurus 66.**



**Above: We drew the Taurus 66 from a Galco Silhouette holster. We liked the high-ride holster. We really liked the Taurus 66 and its handling qualities.**



**The front post worked well in speed shooting. As long as you keep the front sight on target and press the trigger to the rear, you have a hit.**



**Some of the combat groups were very small. This group was fired with 38 Special ammunition.**

heavy trigger action demanded a lot of effort, and firing at 5, 7, and 10 yards, it was a challenge to work up real speed. If we sped up, accuracy suffered. When firing the Magnum load, we found the thin grips were uncomfortable. The revolver squirmed in the hand despite the front strap stippling. The movement was due to the leverage of the barrel moving up during recoil. We did not get scraped or nicked, but we had some metal contact with the hand.

We fired for accuracy at 25 yards from a benchrest position. We used the Remington 38 Special 158-grain RNL Wheelgun, the Hornady 125-grain XTP 357 Magnum, and the Black Hills Ammunition 158-grain JHP. Accuracy results were excellent. Each of the Magnum loads exhibited loads as small as 1.25 inches for five-shot groups at 25 yards. The mild 38 Special felt as if it were generating no recoil at all and was more than accurate enough for practice with a 1.8-inch group average. This is excellent accuracy. As one of the raters noted, the Model 27 is comparable to his long-serving Colt Python in accuracy terms.

The problem was in double-action fire, with the heavy trigger action creating a considerable problem. We oiled the action and dry-fired it an additional 500 times, attempting to burnish the action surfaces — special treatment the other revolvers did not get and did not need — and there was no improvement.

**Our Team Said: Despite the trigger action's heavy pull, we really like the Model 27. Fit, finish, and accuracy are excellent. We rated the Model 27 down a full grade based on the trigger action and another half grade based on the grips, which were not the best suited for firing Magnum loads.**

**Taurus Model 66 2-660041**
**38 Special/357 Magnum, $371**

This came from BudsGunShop.com. The Taurus 66 is the least expensive and the lightest revolver tested. Taurus has performed a neat engineering job by shoehorning seven chambers into a K-frame size revolver. The modification comes off well. Compared to six-shot revolvers, we feel that the seven-shot revolver cycles more quickly with a shorter stroke, although all shooters do not seem to be able to discern the added speed. The Taurus features an adjustable rear sight and post front sight. We did not find the clicks as positive as the Smith & Wesson's, but the Taurus rear sight worked fine for zeroing the pistol.

The hammer spur is checkered, and the wide trigger is smooth and ideal for double-action fire. The double-action trigger is smooth enough, and the single-action trigger breaks at 5.0 pounds after a bit of take up. The hammer houses the Taurus locking system. We did not use it and feel that some will find it useful — it is a sign of the times.

The revolver is supplied in a cardboard box with two keys for the locking system and a neat plastic sight cover to prevent damage to the adjustable sights as they are stored. The finish is a dark-matte-grey color. It isn't showy, but it works okay.

The grips are nicely pebbled and fill in the space behind the trigger guard. There are slight finger grooves. We rated these grips as a great advantage for the Taurus. They are a superior design, even compared to the Ribber grips found on the Taurus Tracker revolvers we have also tested. The Taurus features an underlugged barrel. Another advantage is an additional locking point on the crane, consisting of a detent that aids in keeping the revolver locked tightly. We dry-fired the revolver prior to the combat test. It isn't the smoothest double-action trigger we have used, but the smooth trigger face was comfortable to use going back and forth.

During the combat firing stage, the Taurus 66 turned in the best showing. Speed from leather and speed to an accurate first shot hit

## TAURUS 608 MATTE STAINLESS 2-608049 38 SPECIAL +P/357 MAGNUM, $548

## GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

**The Taurus 608 is a good performer. It wasn't the most accurate revolver, but it is more than accurate enough for hunting or any reasonable chore. The action is smooth enough. It is a big gun. Just the same, the size and eight-shot capacity made it ideal for home defense.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action | Single/Double Action |
| Overall Length | 9.4 in. |
| Overall Height | 6.0 in. |
| Maximum Width (Cylinder) | 1.77 in. |
| Weight Unloaded | 44.0 oz. |
| Weight Loaded | 47.1 oz. |
| Barrel | 4.0 in. stainless steel, compensated |
| Capacity | 8 |
| Frame | Matte stainless steel, large frame |
| Cylinder Material | Matte stainless steel |
| Front Strap Height | 3.0 in. |
| Rear Strap Height | 4.5 in. |
| Grips | Rubber, pebbled |
| Grip Thickness (Max) | 1.1 in. |
| Grip Circumference (Max) | 5.4 in. |
| Front Sight | Fixed post with red insert |
| Rear Sight | Adjustable |
| Sight Radius | 5.75 in. |
| Trigger Pull Weight Double Action | 11.0 lbs. |
| Trigger Pull Weight Single Action | 6.0 lbs. |
| Trigger Span Single Action | 2.7 in. |
| Trigger Span Double Action | 3.5 in. |
| Safety | Transfer bar |
| Warranty | Lifetime |
| Telephone | (800) 327-3776 |
| Website | TaurusUSA.com |
| Made In | Brazil |



**The heavy frame Taurus 608 was a joy to fire during combat drills. We believe the barrel ports worked well. Even firing with one hand, it is controllable.**



**The Taurus 608 had no demerits other than its weight, and it has an 8-round capacity.**

was good with the M66, the lightest revolver tested. Muzzle blast with the magnum load was there, and the barrel rose considerably, but the rubber grips made the chore of controlling the revolver comfortable. We had one flub; a rater could not close the cylinder. The cylinder release had not returned to its original position after the rater hit the release to reload. At least that may be what happened. The rater also thought he perhaps mishandled the reload as the malfunction did not repeat.

The heavier 608 had an advantage in prolonged fire with magnum loads, like what might be experienced in a bowling pin competition. In accuracy testing the M66, the lightest gun tested, bucked and roared in recoil. But all the 357 Magnum loads generated this type of jolt in all three revolvers. The Taurus 66 simply moved the most in recoil due to its weight. We did not have to move our hand or reposition our grip to control the handgun.

**Our Team Said: For personal defense, the Model 66 7-shooter was the top pick from this trio, our shooters said. The Taurus grips made recoil bearable and controllable. Bench accuracy at 2.2 to 2.5 inches was not as good as the Smith & Wesson Model 27 or its Taurus 608 stablemate, but that level of accuracy is acceptable for a personal-defense firearm. But, overall, we preferred the Taurus M66 for most tasks.**



**In combat firing, the Taurus 608 proved superior to the Model 27. However, the fast-handling M66 had an advantage when firing 38 Special loads. When firing Magnum loads, the shooter was jolted more by the M66. These are "use" issues that will have be decided by the owner.**



**A consideration for those who may prefer the Taurus 608 (top) is holster availability. It does not fit N-frame Smith & Wesson holsters, as we found when pressing it into the Galco Combat Master chosen for the Smith & Wesson Model 27 (bottom). A longer and wider cylinder complicates getting a correct fit. We used an Uncle Mike's Super Belt Slide for the M608.**

**Taurus 608 2-608049**
**38 Special/357 Magnum $548**

This also came from BudsGunShop.com. The 608 is much more expensive than the M66 and is also more difficult to locate. It isn't likely to be found on the shelf, per our experience in attempting to locate an example. We went through several distributors before securing the 608.

What we have is a stainless-steel large-frame revolver with a 4-inch barrel and 8-shot cylinder. The Taurus 608 features the same Taurus action lock and transfer bar ignition as the M66, and the same crane lock up. This detent in the crane adds to rigidity as the revolver is fired. The 608 features a heavy underlugged barrel.

There are improvements over both the Taurus 66 and the Smith & Wesson M27. The front sight features a red insert that aids in quickly getting a sight picture. Stainless construction is a plus for carry and outdoors work. The revolver also features eight barrel ports, four on each side of the front sight. We did not find these ports offensive in muzzle blast. Velocity wasn't cut by these ports; in fact the M608, exhibited the highest velocity of the three revolvers by 40 to 70 fps with magnum loads. We really liked the grip design. The grip is practically the same size as the smaller-frame M66 revolver and is much more comfortable than the Smith & Wesson Model 27, in our view. The double-action trigger is smooth enough. The single-action press breaks at 5.0 pounds. One of the raters noted that the bolt-stop cuts on the M66 seven-shooter are cut in the metal between the cylinders, while the eight-shot 608 has bolt stops cut directly over the cylinders. Some may be concerned about the metal thickness between the cylinders and the cuts, but we feel that this is a theoretical concern, at best, with factory loads.

Firing for combat groups, the M608 wasn't as fast from leather as the M66, but it tied with the M27 revolver for speed. Speed to a first shot hit was aided by the red-insert front sight.

The Taurus stays on the target as it is fired and is comfortable in recoil, due to its weight and the efficient Taurus grips. In combat firing, the Taurus 608 proved superior to the Model 27 by a margin. However, the fast-handling M66 had an advantage when firing 38 Special loads. When firing Magnum loads, the shooter was jolted more by the M66. The M66 was faster to the all-important first-shot hit. The M608 provided better combat groups by a margin with magnum loads compared to the Smith & Wesson or the smaller Taurus M66. Absolute accuracy was another matter. In this phase of testing, the M608 was the most comfortable revolver to fire, again because of the greater weight compared to the M66 and superior grips compared to the M27. Fired for bench accuracy, the M608 proved more accurate than the M66, with some groups as small as 1.8 inches.

**Our Team Said: The M608 provided good performance for the price. We carefully weighed the performance against the price and found the 608's stainless construction, efficient barrel ports, red insert front sight, and extra round advantages over the Taurus M66. However, it is also heavier and more difficult to conceal. Only the owner may answer if the extra features are worth an extra $200. We think the M66 could be a concealed-carry gun that doubles as a house gun. We would choose the Taurus 608 as a field gun that doubles as a house gun.**

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

| VALUE GUIDE: 357 MAGNUM REVOLVERS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **GUN NAME** | **ISSUE** | **GRADE** | **COMMENTS** |
| **Ruger GP100 KGP-141 38 Special +P/357 Mag., $500** | Sep. 2018 | A | The stainless-steel GP100 performs in all categories: accuracy, smoothness, control, and velocity. |
| **S&W M66 Combat Magnum 38 Sp. +P/357 Mag., $420** | Sep. 2018 | B+ | Stainless steel, smooth action, and a round-butt configuration seldom seen on the Combat Magnum. |
| **Ruger GP100 GP-141 38 Sp. +P/357 Mag. $480** | Sep. 2018 | B+ | The blued GP100 doesn't perform on par with the stainless, and the stainless is easier to maintain. |
| **S&W M19 Combat Magnum 38 Sp. +P/357 Mag., $800** | Sep. 2018 | B | Came with a display case and a knife with matching serial number — pretty neat, but also pricey. |
| **Taurus Model 66 38 Sp. +P/357 Mag., $325** | Sep. 2018 | B- | The barrel length of 6 inches did not generate greater velocity. Current-production version is 2-660069. |
| **Ruger Security Six 357 Mag., $430-$450** | July 2017 | B+ | Had good accuracy with user-friendly sights; recoil was mild due to its bulk. |
| **Colt Lawman Mk III 357 Mag., $450-$525** | July 2017 | B | A full-size revolver, so it is less concealable. Offered pleasant recoil. Double-action pull was too heavy. |
| **S&W Model 686 357 Mag., $600-$850** | Apr. 2015 | A | Team members liked the slender 686, even though it had less capacity. |
| **S&W Performance Center M627 170133 357 Mag., $1079** | Apr. 2015 | A | A well-made, nice-shooting revolver with a ball-detent lock up, chamfered chambers, and excellent sights. |
| **S&W Performance Center M327 170245 357 Mag., $1309** | Apr. 2015 | B | Needed a different grip to be concealed easily, and the short ejector rod caused us to rely on gravity for reloads. |
| **Smith & Wesson M19-4 357 Mag., $450-$750** | Mar. 2015 | A | This was an older "pre-lock" revolver we would seek out to buy, enjoy, and pass down. |
| **FN Barracuda 357 Mag., $450-$750** | Mar. 2015 | B+ | The Barracuda was a well-made revolver. A shame the 9mm cylinder wasn't included. |
| **Colt Trooper MK III 357 Mag., $600+** | Mar. 2015 | C+ | This particular revolver had been fired with hot loads and was in need of servicing. Watch for that. |
| **Ruger GP100 Match Champion No. 1754 357 Mag., $899** | Dec. 2014 | A- | The Match Champion is undoubtedly one of Ruger's best revolvers. |
| **S&W Pro Series 686 SSR 178012 357 Mag., $999** | Dec. 2014 | B+ | The 686 SSR is ready to go for IDPA Stock Service Revolver competition. |
| **Smith & Wesson M60 178013 3-in. Barrel 357 Mag., $799** | Sep. 2014 | A | Light and thin but packs plenty of power. Adjustable night sights are helpful for carry. |
| **Ruger GP100 No. 1705 357 Mag., $759** | Mar. 2014 | A | In rapid fire, the Ruger was very controllable and pleasure to shoot due to the weight. |
| **Taurus Model 66 No. 66SS4 357 Mag., $591** | Mar. 2014 | A | We would buy this one in a second for trail carry and home defense. |
| **Colt Python (1988) 357 Mag., $2500** | Apr. 2013 | A+ | True revolver aficionados should start saving up to buy one of these classics. |
| **Smith & Wesson Model 686-2 357 Mag., $900 (1988)** | Apr. 2013 | A- | You can't go wrong with a Very Good, Excellent, or Like New Model 686-2. |

# Slim-Line 9mm Contest: Ruger, Beretta, and Bond Arms

*The brand-new Bond Arms Bullpup handgun design takes on two veterans of the carry wars, the APX Carry from Beretta and a spiffed-up LC9s from Ruger. We found two really good compact choices.*

The slim-line 9mm is the most popular concealed-carry handgun in America, according to polls and gun sales. The type is compact enough for good concealment, reliable in good examples, and powerful enough for personal defense, while not generating so much recoil as to provide a daunting proposition in training. It is not surprising, then, that makers are introducing new models to compete in this market. While the field seems crowded, this is good for the consumer, who now has a broad choice. One small detail or the other may sway the shooter, and the final pick is a handgun that suits their needs and style well. With this in mind we tested three 9mm Luger handguns:

- The *Ruger LC9s 3260, $437*, is a proven model with certain upgrades, including a tastefully engraved slide;
- The *Beretta APX Carry JAXN920, $398*, is a single-stack version of the double-column-magazine Beretta APX; and
- The *Bond Arms Bullpup 9, $904*, is a new and improved rendition of the Boberg 9mm pistol.

We used four loads to test the three handguns. Two of the ammo choices are on the Bond Arms list of recommended self-defense and target ammo listed on the company's website. These were the Winchester 115-grain full-metal-jacket round and the Federal 124-grain HST fodder. A load not listed on the Bond Arms site, but which provided good function, is the Black Hills Ammunition 124-grain jacketed hollow point.

We also used a +P loading in later testing for function. After testing the standard-pressure loads, we fired a last run on the combat range with a +P load, the Black Hills Ammunition 100-grain Honey Badger, which sells for $27.62 per 20 rounds at TargetSportsUSA.com. At 1300 fps, this load produced heavier recoil than the standard-pressure loads, which is to be expected. Though Bond Arms does not recommend this load in the Bullpup 9, the Honey Badger was reliable in all three in limited shooting, two magazines per pistol.

After all this shooting, here is what we found out about each gun:



**Top to bottom are the Ruger LC9s special edition with engraved slide, Beretta's APX Carry, and the Bond Arms Bullpup 9. All had a degree of compromise inherent in small handguns, but all were reliable. Top, the LC9s is offered in several variations. Here, we liked the engraved version for its cosmetics. The pebbled tapewrap is worth its price, $18 from TalonGunGrips.com. But the LC9s did not come with a spare magazine, which set us back $30. Middle: The freshest design, the Beretta APX Carry, is surprisingly easy to use well. It fell behind in bench accuracy, but on the combat range, it shined. Bottom: The Bond Arms Bullpup 9 is a credible handgun with excellent fit and finish. The pistol fills a real need for those who need an ultra-compact 9mm. The Bullpup 9 is the easiest 9mm pistol to rack that we have tested.**

## Beretta APX Carry JAXN920 9mm Luger, $398

This is a recent price at ClassicFirearms.com. Concealed-carry permits are on the rise; something we at Gun Tests and freedom-loving Americans applaud and support. Another fact that is good to know is that the majority of new permit holders are

## BERETTA APX CARRY JAXN920 9MM LUGER, $398

## GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

**The Beretta APX Carry builds upon the proven Nano and borrows from the full-size and compact APX pistols. The result is a desirable combination of features, including good reliability and practical accuracy.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action Type | Locked breech, striker fired, double action only |
| Overall Length | 5.63 in. |
| Overall Height | 4.16 in. |
| Maximum Width | 1.0 in. |
| Weight Unloaded | 19.8 oz. |
| Weight Loaded | 22.4 oz. |
| Slide Material | Forged Steel |
| Slide Retraction Effort | 16.0 lbs. |
| Receiver Material | Polymer |
| Finish | Black |
| Front Strap Height | 1.3 in. |
| Back Strap Height | 3.0 in. |
| Barrel Length | 3.0 in. |
| Grip Thickness (Maximum) | 0.9 in. |
| Grip Circumference | 5.6 in. |
| Magazine | (1) 6- and (1) 8-round |
| Rear Sight | Drift adjustable |
| Front Sight | Removable front post |
| Sight Radius | 4.5 in. |
| Trigger Pull Weight | 5.7 lbs. |
| Trigger Span | 2.6 in. |
| Safety | Lever in trigger, firing-pin block |
| Warranty | 1-year limited |
| Telephone | (800) 573-4445 |
| Website | Beretta.com |
| Made In | USA |



**Here's a closer look at the grooves along the slide. They were wide and easy to grasp.**



**We like the serrated rear sight blade, which kept glare from interfering with the sight picture. The Beretta's well-designed sights helped in accurate combat firing.**



**Above: The Beretta Nano isn't a bad compact handgun, but the Beretta APX 9mm is a better shooter, we proved at the range.**

choosing capable handguns. Few are 32 ACPs and 380 ACPs. The most popular choices are 9mm Luger chamberings (aka 9x19mm, 9mm Para). The slim 9mm has rewritten the rules of concealed carry. A smaller handgun may be carried with confidence due to new ammunition developments, without resorting to a heavy-recoiling 45 ACP or 357 Magnum. The 9mm isn't a 45 ACP in terms of terminal performance, but the 9mm is a baseline for personal defense. The original Beretta APX is a Glock 17–size handgun designed for military competition. The APX Compact is a Glock 19–size handgun. The new Beretta APX Carry competes with the Smith & Wesson Shield and Glock 43 as well as the rest of the handguns tested. So, Beretta had a design to work with when perfecting the Beretta APX Carry.

The Beretta APX is obviously based on the Beretta Nano, although the APX is slightly larger. The sights are better than the Nano's, and the APX features a slide lock,









Above left: The Beretta APX Carry is slim. Right column: The APX carry offers cocking grooves from any angle you wish.



All the pistols were fired for function from the retention position. Care must be taken to control the pistol or you will fire low.



The Beretta APX Carry 9mm is supplied with a nice zippered case.



The Beretta APX handles +P loads well, but there is a greater push, of course.

The Beretta magazine catch is positive in operation, and the pistol is fast to reload.



while the Nano does not. The APX features a conventional striker-fired action. The double-action-only trigger pulls the striker to the rear against spring pressure after the striker has been prepped by the slide's action. The trigger action is deceptively light in feel. It feels like 5.5 pounds, a Glock standard, but breaks against the Lyman trigger-pull gauge at 6.2 pounds. Reset is crisp. A rapid trigger reset is sometimes a greater aid in combat shooting than a lighter trigger action. A lever set into the trigger prevents lateral discharge. Coupled with good sights, the trigger action provided good performance in the combat run.

Elsewhere, we had no problem executing speed loads. The Beretta is supplied with two magazines, reasonable for the price. The pistol is supplied with a flush-fit 6-round magazine and an extended 8-round magazine. We expected a difference in handling. The difference was not as profound as we thought. The 6-round flush-fit magazine is ideal for pocket carry, given a larger pocket such as crews and carried in a Swaprig crews-type pocket holster. With the 8-round magazine, the footprint remains small when the handgun was carried in a Galco Stow-and-Go inside-the-waistband holster. These two magazines offer versatility. The pistol's grip treatment offers a good balance of adhesion and abrasion. The pistol also features a slide filled with cocking serrations. These serrations work well, but they are not sharp and don't hang on clothing or holsters. While we

## BOND ARMS BULLPUP 9 9MM LUGER, $904

## GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

**The Bond Arms Bullpup is an interesting design. The pistol features a rotating barrel with two locking lugs that lock into the slide and one into the locking block. The pistol does not lock open on the last shot, but may be locked open by rotating the takedown lever from the 3 o'clock to the 6 o'clock position. Unlike on the Boberg pistol, these magazines drop free. While the pistol is impressive on accuracy and reliability, this isn't a handgun for the casual shooter.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action Type | Rotating barrel operated, locked breech, hammer-fired, double action only |
| Overall Length | 5.1 in. |
| Overall Height | 4.2 in. |
| Maximum Width | 0.96 in. |
| Weight Unloaded | 18.6 oz. |
| Weight Loaded | 21.2 oz. |
| Slide Material | Stainless forged steel |
| Slide Retraction Effort | 10.0 lbs. |
| Receiver Material | Aluminum |
| Finish | Black |
| Front Strap Height | 1.75 in. |
| Back Strap Height | 2.75 in. |
| Barrel Length | 3.35 in. |
| Grip Thickness (Maximum) | 1.2 in. |
| Grip Circumference | 5.3 in. |
| Magazine | (4) 7 round |
| Rear Sight | Drift adjustable |
| Front Sight | Dovetail post, drift adjustable |
| Sight Radius | 4.0 in. |
| Trigger Pull Weight | 7.0 lbs. |
| Trigger Span | 2.82 in. |
| Safety | No manual device |
| Warranty | 3-year limited |
| Telephone | (817) 573-4445 |
| Website | BondArms.com |
| Made In | USA |



**Here's a topdown look at the inside of the Bullpup 9's receiver. What's likely most unusual to shooters is the naked spring amidships; the mags don't have followers like others do.**



**Here's the top of the slide. The arrow marks the location of the ejection port. The unusual arrangement and shape of parts are something the owner will have to learn.**

did not usually use the forward serrations, they worked well when we tried them out. They may be better referred to as cocking grooves.

During the combat-firing stages, the pistol fired low. We corrected that by maintaining a heavy grip. Polymer-frame pistols with a steel slide sometimes fire low if the shooter fires too quickly or does not keep a firm grip. Each handgun must be learned. By the end of the firing stage, we were doing better with center hits on each run.

There are no malfunctions of any type in our notes. We split the firing time between the two magazines, turning in generally equal results with either. The pistol never failed to feed, chamber, fire, or eject. During the combat course, the pistol was comparable or superior to the other handguns. Each gave a good showing in fast combat shooting.

On the benchrest, the Beretta APX Carry posted less absolute accuracy than the Bond Arms Bullpup 9 or the Ruger LC9s Engraved. This is despite the pistol's slight advantage over the other two in combat shooting drills. Striker-fired pistols are often easier to manage.

**Our Team Said: The Beretta APX Carry pistol earns high marks. We feel it is the Best Buy of the test. We based this on faultless reliability, excellent sights, good tactical cocking grooves, superior combat shooting, and acceptable, if middle of the road, paper accuracy.**



The Bond Arms pistol's bold sights are an advantage in combat shooting. The three-dot sights gave good results on the firing range.



Note the different flat-type hammer of the Bullpup 9.



Note rotating barrel, the barrel lug and feed ram. After several hundred rounds without cleaning, the pistol is none the worse for wear.



At top is the slide assembly for the Bullpup, bottom is the receiver. The arrow points to the takedown lever. The part at the right is called the unlock block. Disassembly isn't difficult, but we had some trouble getting it back together.



The Bond Arms Bullpup 9 is supplied with a total of four magazines.



The Bond Arms trigger is excellent and provided good results on the firing range.

**Bond Arms Bullpup 9 9mm Luger, $904**

This was a recent price at BudsGunShop.com. The Bond Arms Bullpup 9 is a unique pistol in many ways. It owes little to preceding designs, save for the now-out-of-production Boberg XR 9 pistol. Bond Arms purchased the rights to the Boberg XR 9 and apparently the machinery. The Boberg had several problems, not the least of which was its cost. No matter how good the design or performance, the Boberg 9mm's purchase price at about $1300 limited sales to a well-heeled few.

There were also function problems related to the design. Like many rotating-barrel handguns, the Boberg demanded heavy lubrication on the barrel and

rotating block for reliable function. Bond Arms has made legitimate improvement in the design and lowered the price tag to a list of less than a thousand dollars. The actual price is as low as a few bucks under $900, with the pistol in stock at BudsGunShop.com for $904 as of late June. The Bullpup 9mm is a single-column magazine 9mm. There the resemblance to any other handgun ends.

The Bond Arms Bullpup 9 pistol is identical in dimension and operation to the original Boberg 9. The design uses a rotating barrel. This is unusual in a small handgun. The full-size Beretta Storm, the Beretta/Stoeger Cougar, and the out-of-production Mauser M2 use the rotating-barrel system. Recoil is controlled by this system in a manner that may limit recoil. On the other hand, rotating barrel handguns in general demand frequent lubrication to remain functional. When Bond Arms redesigned some particulars, they discovered and adopted a process for coating the barrel locking lugs and locking block. This coating, in use on AR-15 rifles, eliminated much of the requirement for the pistol to be lubricated constantly. Another feature that is more unusual than the rotating barrel is the rear-feeding magazine. Most pistols feature a conventional magazine that stops the cartridge at the case rim with the bullet end pointed toward the opening feedway of the magazine. The front is open to allow the bullet end of the cartridge to feed from the magazine. The Bond Arms Bullpup 9 features a magazine that butts the nose into a stop at the front of the magazine, with the rear of the magazine open. There is no follower; the cartridges sit on top of the magazine spring. This rearward feeding magazine is necessary due to the design of the Bullpup, and it's where the pistol gets its name. Although it isn't a Bullpup in the usual sense of a bullpup-type rifle, it is as close as a pistol may get. The action sits ahead of the pistol chamber. With the magazine location and the chamber to the rear of the trigger, the pistol feeds by means of a device

## RUGER LC9S ENGRAVED SLIDE 3260 9MM LUGER, $455

## GUN TESTS GRADE: A

**The Ruger LC9s narrowly missed being the Best Buy. This was a good handgun with a couple of touches that take it beyond Ruger's usual utilitarian fare.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action Type | Short recoil-operated locked breech, striker fired |
| Overall Length | 6.0 in. |
| Overall Height | 4.6 in. |
| Maximum Width | 0.9 in. |
| Weight Unloaded | 17.0 oz. |
| Weight Loaded | 19.8 oz. |
| Slide | Forged alloy steel, blued |
| Slide Retraction Effort | 19.0 lbs. |
| Receiver Material | Black glass-reinforced nylon |
| Front Strap Height | 2.1 in. |
| Back Strap Height | 2.75 in. |
| Barrel | 3.12 in. long, blued steel, 6 grooves, 1:10 RH twist; loaded-chamber inspection port |
| Grip Thickness (Maximum) | 0.875 in. |
| Grip Circumference | 5.0 in. |
| Grip | Checkered |
| Magazine | (1) 7 round |
| Rear Sight | Drift adjustable, two dots |
| Front Sight | Dovetail post, one dot |
| Sight Radius | 4.5 in. |
| Trigger Pull Weight | 6.0 lbs. |
| Trigger Span | 2.8 in. |
| Safety | Trigger lever, frame-mounted lever |
| Warranty | None written |
| Telephone | (336) 949-5200 |
| Website | Ruger.com |
| Made In | USA |





**Far left: Each of the pistols was more difficult to fire with +P loads. We liked the Ruger's trigger action when firing for combat accuracy. Near left: The Ruger LC9s tended to eject cartridge cases slightly forward rather than backward.**

that grasps the cartridge-case rim and moves the cartridge to the rear. As the spent case is ejected, the feed rail moves the cartridge into the chamber, and the cartridge is fed into the chamber. The feed rail maintains its grasp on the cartridge case rim and ejects the spent cartridge case after firing.

The action is a double-action-only type. The trigger is quite smooth in operation. Initial trigger compression was 7.5 pounds. After the test period, which began with a new Bond Arms Bullpup and continued for several weeks as each rater took his time with the handgun, the pistol's trigger press settled into a smooth 7.0 pounds. The trigger action had no creep, stacking, or backlash. This allows good trigger control. The sights are good examples of combat pistol sights, making for rapid sight alignment. The pistol features a steel slide and aluminum frame. The grips are well done, cut from a dense wood that appears to be either rosewood or cocobolo. They are nicely checkered. The original Boberg 9mm used plastic grips despite its $1300 price tag. A purpose of the Bullpup design is to make possible a full-length slide and barrel on a small frame. The result is a pistol that appears to have a very short barrel, but which actually has a 3.4-inch tube. There is no heavy recoil spring, but only a small spring that Bond Arms calls a slide-return spring. The slide-cocking serrations are more than adequate for easy slide racking.

The Bond Arms company supplies a list of recommended loadings. Since we must adhere to fuel requirements for an engine and operating instructions for a computer, this is reasonable. The list is by no means short; there are more than 30 practice and personal-defense loads listed. The problem isn't feed reliability, but rather the strength of the case crimp on the bullet. A loading without an adequate-to-tight-taper crimp may have the bullet pulled from the cartridge case during the Bond Arms Bullpup's unusual feed cycle. Even using the recommended loads, we discovered, on removing an unfired round from the chamber in several instances, there was a small but perceptible movement of the bullet forward. Conversely, it isn't unusual for a bullet to be pressed into the cartridge slightly on meeting the feed ramp with some designs. The Bond Arms has the opposite concern. We never experienced a bullet moving forward enough to affect velocity or function.

The pistol is very well finished and well fitted. There were no tool marks. The pistol is delivered in a padded box and supplied with a total of four magazines. The design does not allow the slide to lock open on the last shot. The slide may be manually locked open by retracting the slide and rotating the takedown lever.

Takedown isn't particularly complicated. The takedown lever is rotated fully, and the barrel and slide moved forward off the frame. The barrel and locking lug block are removed. There is a very thin recoil spring, which Bond Arms calls a slide-return spring. The rotating barrel absorbs most of the recoil of the slide. When reassembling the pistol, we ran into a snag. The senior rater is an experienced individual who has used many firearms. It took him some time to get the disassembled pistol back together. The second and third time, the breakdown was much simpler. Just the same, this isn't a pistol for the casually interested. While we felt the new self-lubricating finish was effective, we properly lubricated the rotating barrel and locking block with Ballistol before beginning the evaluation. However, we did not add lubrication in firing more than 300 rounds in the Bullpup 9.

When loading the pistol, the shooter must add a quick snap or the loading rail may press the bullet nose under the chamber. This is addressed by properly racking the slide. Due to the rotating-barrel design, the slide is very easy to rack, perhaps the easiest 9mm slide to rack we have ever tested and handled. But be certain to bring the slide fully to the rear and



**The Ruger isn't difficult to disassemble, however, we are leery of designs that feature non-captive parts, such as a takedown pin. Through hard experience, we know they are easy to lose.**



**We liked the slide lock (front arrow) and manual safety (rear arrow). They worked better than those controls on a Ruger Security 9 compact recently tested.**

## 9MM LUGER RANGE DATA

| Black Hills 115-grain FMJ | Bond Arms Bullpup 9 | Ruger LC9s ES | Beretta APX Carry |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average Velocity | 1070 fps | 1022 fps | 1067 fps |
| Muzzle Energy | 292 ft.-lbs. | 267 ft.-lbs. | 291 ft.-lbs. |
| Small Group | 1.5 in. | 1.4 in. | 2.0 in. |
| Average Group | 2.0 in. | 2.0 in. | 2.6 in. |
| **Federal Premium 124-grain HST** | **Bond Arms Bullpup 9** | **Ruger LC9s ES** | **Beretta APX Carry** |
| Average Velocity | 1098 fps | 1080 fps | 1084 fps |
| Muzzle Energy | 332 ft.-lbs. | 321 ft.-lbs. | 324 ft.-lbs. |
| Small Group | 1.3 in. | 1.8 in. | 1.8 in. |
| Average Group | 1.9 in. | 2.25 in. | 2.4 in. |
| **Black Hills 124 grain JHP** | **Bond Arms Bullpup 9** | **Ruger LC9s ES** | **Beretta APX Carry** |
| Average Velocity | 1121 fps | 1090 fps | 1100 fps |
| Muzzle Energy | 346 ft.-lbs. | 327 ft.-lbs. | 333 ft.-lbs. |
| Small Group | 1.7 in. | 1.8 in. | 2.0 in. |
| Average Group | 2.1 in. | 2.0 in. | 2.8 in. |



**The taller group (ellipse) was fired from the Ruger LC9s, the lower and tighter group from the Beretta APX Carry (rectangle).**

*All groups were fired at 15 yards from a benchrest position using a Bullshooter pistol rest. We used a Competition Electronics Pro Chrony to measure velocity. The chronograph was 10 feet from the muzzle of the firearm. Ammo sources: Black Hills Ammunition 115-grain FMJ ($12.52/20 from TargetSportsUSA.com); Black Hills Ammunition 124-grain JHP ($14.57/20 from BudsGunShop.com); and Federal 124-grain HST ($18.12/20 from BudsGunShop.com).*

allow it to load with a sharp snap.

We began with the magazines loaded with the Winchester 115-grain FMJs. The smooth trigger face was comfortable and offered good leverage and control. The pistol came on target quickly. Control was excellent. The rotating barrel seems to control recoil. Despite the relatively light 17.5-ounce weight of the pistol, recoil was modest. As one of the raters noted, "This is a soft shooter." Combat accuracy is good. We fired at 7, 10, and 15 yards in combat firing and also took more difficult shots at range objects and dirt clods on the berm at 20 to 25 yards, firing a total of 200 rounds of the Winchester 115-grain FMJs. The Bond Arms pistol fared better than the Ruger in combat firing tests, and while it outshot the Ruger in absolute accuracy, the Ruger isn't a dog. The Bond Arms pistol simply exhibited superior accuracy, a neat trick for a double-action-only handgun shooting against a striker-fired handgun. We also fired 60 cartridges each of the Federal HST and Black Hills 124-grain JHP loads in each pistol. When firing from a solid benchrest firing position, the Bond Arms pistol gave good to excellent results. The trigger is smooth and resets at the end of its travel. Reset is distinct. By carefully working the action, we got excellent accuracy was realized. Groups at 15 yards were an average of well under 3.0 inches.




**We added a +P loading to quality performance. All three pistols gave good results.**

The pistol is the most expensive tested. The operating manual demands using the slingshot method to load the chamber. The pistol does not lock open on the last shot after firing. The magazines do not stick but drop free. In return, we have a pistol with excellent fit and finish, solid reliability, good combat accuracy, a very small footprint for concealed carry, and four magazines. The slide is easy to rack. The magazines are also easy to load.

**Our Team Said: The Bullpup's sole demerit as a personal-defense pistol is that the slide doesn't lock open on the last shot. We rated the pistol down a half grade on this feature, which we admit some of the raters did not feel was a demerit for a**



**Left: The Ruger LC9s, top, and the Beretta APX Carry set a high performance bar for other compact 9mm pistols. Both offer consumers a lot.**

**pistol destined for short-range personal defense. Others felt it was a serious demerit and would not consider the handgun for personal defense as a result. The DAO trigger offers a second strike for those who like a second-strike capability; we prefer clearing the dud round. Considering the price of comparable small 9mm designs, such as the Kimber Solo and Springfield EMP, the price isn't a demerit, but neither is it attractive to the average shooter.**

### Ruger LC9s Engraved Slide 3260
### 9mm Luger, $455

This was a recent price at BudsGunShop.com, for the handgun with one magazine. We added a second magazine, making the all-in price $485. In comparison, a standard Ruger LC9s was only $296 from the same retailer, so this distributor exclusive (TALO) commands quite a premium.

The Ruger LC9s is a striker-fired version of the original Ruger LC9, which was a hammer-fired handgun. The LC9s is a relatively thin handgun, similar to the smaller and popular LCP 380 ACP. While the owner must decide if the extra $141 for engraving is worthwhile, we occasionally like to test and evaluate a customized or special-edition handgun. The LC9s tested is the personal handgun of one of the raters, and he added Talon grip tape ($18, TalonGunGrips.com), as he often does to his polymer-frame handguns, after we had done the preliminary testing of the base model. The Talon grip wrap was well worth its price.

It was less of a pleasure to order a spare magazine for the LC9s ($30 for a 9-round extended magazine, at BudsGunShop.com), which we thought necessary because the LC9s was supplied with a single magazine. These magazines are reliable, but they were very difficult to load with a ninth round, so we counted the magazines as 8-rounders. The less expensive Beretta APX carry is supplied with two mags, and the Bullpup with four, so the Ruger fell behind in value as a consequence.

The Ruger features good sights and a relatively smooth trigger action. The trigger breaks at 6.0 pounds, clean, with minimal take up. The slide and frame are relatively thin. The magazine release and slide lock are positive in operation. The pistol features a manual safety. We really like this for carry close to the body, and the lever operated as expected, but we found it was more difficult to place on Safe. It locked with a solid click. Moving the safety to the Fire position wasn't difficult, and the safety fell under the shooter's thumb easily.

Moving the hammer from the frame and a striker into the slide makes for an easier-shooting pistol over the original LC9. The trigger action is very good and provided good results on the firing range. The sights are good to excellent. Notably, in a previous match-up, the Ruger LC9s outperformed the Beretta Nano by a margin. This time, the new Beretta APX Carry gave a better showing, and while the APX is larger than the Nano, the change isn't much, but the sights and slide lock of the APX Carry make it a better choice than the Nano. In combat shooting, the APX Carry was more controllable and exhibited tighter X-ring placement than the other two handguns.

The Ruger was the only pistol tested that features a manual safety. This was more important to some shooters than others. The thumb safety was unobtrusive, positive in operation, and may be activated easily. It featured good indent, so it will not slip off easily. It fell under the thumb when taking a natural firing grip.

The Ruger's takedown, accomplished by depressing a bar on the left side of the frame and removing a pin, was simple enough to do. However, this takedown isn't as simple as on other handguns. In this set, the Ruger is easier than the Bond Arms handgun to reassemble. The Beretta demanded a pin in the frame be moved counterclockwise, but it remained captive in the handgun. So, these handguns do not have a big-gun-easy-takedown sequence.

At the range, the Ruger exhibited the least velocity of the three handguns. This isn't significant, but it was worth mentioning and was certainly a consideration in rating.

**Our Team Said: The pistol is thin, and in our experience, was a very concealable handgun. There were no malfunctions or failures to feed of any type during the test. The pistol was fired from the benchrest with the three loads from Winchester, Federal, and Black Hills Ammunition. Accuracy was more service grade than pocket-pistol grade. The Ruger LC9s gave good performance and offers real utility for personal defense.**

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

| VALUE GUIDE: 9MM LUGER HANDGUN RANKINGS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **GUN NAME** | **ISSUE** | **GRADE** | **COMMENTS** |
| **Glock 43X Ameriglo Night Sights PX435SL301AB 9mm Luger, $542** | July 2019 | A | Our Pick. Firing grip is superior to the G43 and allows better shooting with little compromise in concealment. |
| **Glock 48 PA485SL301AB 9mm Luger, $488** | July 2019 | A | Best-shooting pistol in the test and the most powerful. Minimally more difficult to conceal than the others. |
| **Mossberg MC1sc 89001 9mm Luger, $365** | July 2019 | A- | Best Buy. The Mossberg 9mm gave up little to the Glock designs. Reliability was never a question. |
| **Springfield XD(M) 4.5 9mm Luger XDMT9459FDEHCE TB, $505** | Apr. 2019 | A | Our Pick as a personal-defense, home-defense, and tactical pistol. |
| **Glock G34 Gen5 MOS PA3430103MOS 9mm Luger, $710** | Apr. 2019 | A | The Gen5 guns are the best yet, with superior accuracy and features over earlier Glocks. |
| **CZ-USA CZ P0-9 91620 9mm Luger, $402** | Apr. 2019 | B | Best Buy. CZ has managed to pack a lot of value into the P0-9. 19-round magazine. |
| **FNH FNS-9L Longslide 66725 9mm Luger, $570** | Apr. 2019 | B | Heavier trigger than the other pistols. Accuracy wasn't as good. |
| **Glock 45 9mm Luger, $546** | Jan. 2019 | A | Fast from concealed carry. The action allows a trained shooter to make fast hits. Reliable. |
| **Beretta APX Compact JAXC921 9mm Luger, $449** | Jan. 2019 | B | Magazines were difficult to load. Slide was difficult to rack. Takedown button too tight. |
| **SIG P320-M17 320F-9-M17-MS 9mm Luger, $770** | Jan. 2019 | B | The grip fits most hands well and the sights are excellent. The DAO trigger was too heavy. |
| **Beretta 92 FS JS92F300M 9mm Luger, $562** | Jan. 2019 | B | Shows the age of its design with a slide-mounted decocker and long DA trigger pull. |
| **Taurus G2S 1-G2S931 9mm Luger, $204** | Nov. 2018 | A | Best Buy. The Taurus pistol was reliable and controllable in rapid fire. |
| **Smith & Wesson M&P9 Shield SW180021BW 9mm Luger, $400** | Nov. 2018 | A | The Battleworn Shield is reliable, accurate enough, and compact enough for EDC. |
| **Bersa BP9MCC 9mm Luger, $295** | Nov. 2018 | A- | Reliable, feels good in the hand, and offers excellent handling in fast-paced drills. |
| **Honor Defense Honor Guard HG9SCF FIST 9mm Luger, $400** | Nov. 2018 | A- | The FIST option is viable. We tested it against barricades with excellent results. |
| **Ruger EC9s 3283 9mm Luger, $231** | Nov. 2018 | B- | Most accurate handgun of the test, despite its light weight. |
| **Smith & Wesson M&P9 M2.0 Compact 11686 9mm Luger, $476** | June 2018 | A | Pleasing trigger action, good gripping surface, a rail, and grip inserts. |
| **Glock G19X G5 PX1950703 9mm Luger, $594** | June 2018 | A- | Has many of the good features of the Gen5s. Fast from leather, fast on target, reliable. |
| **Ruger SR1911 L'wt Commander 6722 9mm Luger, $739** | June 2018 | B | For those who like the single-action 1911 cocked-and-locked, this is a good choice. |
| **SIG Sauer P225-A1 Nitron 225A-9-BSS-C 9mm Luger, $880** | June 2018 | B- | Slim grip appeals to shooters with small hands. No rail and low magazine capacity. |

# .410-Bore Hunting Shotguns: Mossberg, TriStar, & Stevens

*We test a single shot, a pumpgun, and a semi-automatic head to head with the diminutive, but still effective, .410 shotshell. Even for turkeys, it's effective within its range.*

While most turkey hunters think a 12-gauge shotgun loaded with 3.5-inch shells is the optimum set up for turkey — and we think it is, too — newer sub-gauge shotguns can get the job done if you are up for the challenge. It's not all marketing hype, as we discovered. We tested three brands of shotguns — Mossberg, TriStar, and Stevens — with a variety of .410-bore loads to determine if a .410 was a viable option for turkey hunting. in our opinion, yes and no. It all depends on the shotshell load and the distance to the tom. Even with a 3.5-inch 12-gauge load, a shot is not necessarily a slam dunk. That's why it's called turkey hunting and not turkey shooting.

We've tested a number of newer .410 defense loads in the recent past and found these loads can make an excellent impression on a bad actor determined to do you harm. As the new defense loads have been developed, so have hunting and target loads. While the .410 may not be as popular as 12- and 20-gauge shotguns, technology has a way of eventually reaching into all bores and gauges. Recently, Savage announced the release of a new .410 shotgun paired with a .410 load, all designed for turkey hunting. What? A .410 turkey load? So, with the thought of dispelling the silliness Savage is suggesting with a .410 turkey gun, we procured the new Savage and two other .410 shotguns. Our test shotguns included:

- the *Savage/Stevens Model 301 Turkey Obsession 19253* break-action single shot;
- the *Mossberg Model 500 Turkey 50109* pump repeater; and
- the new *TriStar Viper G2 Bronze 24181*, a semi-automatic repeater.

While the TriStar Viper G2 Bronze is not a camo finish, TriStar does import full-camo models, or the owner could install his own camo tape if he needed to. We felt these three guns were a good assortment of current .410-bore shotguns and at a variety of prices points, with the Stevens being inexpensive, the TriStar at the high end, and the Mossberg squarely in the middle. We also chose these three models to look at the various actions available and because the actions were scaled down to the .410 shell, so there was not a lot of extra weight on the guns. They all feel petite in hand, as if they had been shrunk.

We found the ammunition was an important consideration. Since .410 guns are generally considered an expert's gun, they don't provide a lot of wiggle room if you are slightly off target. Many well-intentioned



**Right: Our .410 bore shotguns included the small Stevens 301 Turkey Obsession (left), which is formidable, especially when stoked with Federal TSS loads. The Mossberg 500 Turkey (center) offers slick operation, fast follow-up shots, and a reasonable price. The TriStar Viper G2 (right) is an elegant and efficient .410 bore that is quite suited for turkey, quail, or doves as well as squirrel and rabbit, depending on the load.**

shooters feel the .410 makes a great first shotgun, and that can be true only if the new shooter is adept at shooting. The .410 bore can be difficult to use, even for expert wingshooters. A .410 has limited resources, meaning it has fewer pellets than a 12 or 20 gauge. It does provide much less recoil than a 12 and 20, so they could be well suited for recoil-shy shooters, though we suggest if you do use these .410s for turkey

## MOSSBERG MODEL 500 TURKEY 50109 .410 BORE, $303

### GUN TESTS GRADE: B+

**This M500 had a smooth-operating slide, nice Mossy Oak Bottomland camo finish, and offered light to minimal recoil. We would have liked chokes tubes instead of a fixed choke.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action Type | Pump |
| Chamber Size | 3.0 in. |
| Overall Length | 45.75 in. |
| Capacity | 5+1 (2.5-in. shells), 4+1 (3-in. shells) |
| Weight Unloaded | 6.5 lbs. |
| Weight Loaded | 7.3 lbs. |
| Barrel Length | 26.0 in. |
| Barrel | MO Bottomland camo finish, steel, vent rib |
| Receiver | MO Bottomland camo finish, alloy |
| Choke | Fixed, F |
| Buttstock LOP | 13.87 in. |
| Buttstock | Textured polymer, ventilated recoil pad, sling studs |
| Forend | Textured polymer |
| Sights | Red-fiber optic tube |
| Trigger Pull Weight | 6.06 lbs. |
| Safety | Ambidextrous thumb |
| Warranty | Limited lifetime |
| Telephone | (800) 363-3555 |
| Website | Mossberg.com |
| Made In | USA |



**The slide release is a small button just behind the trigger (arrow). It is similar to other Model 500 shotguns made by Mossberg.**



**The 500 should have choke tubes, in our opinion. This would make the shotgun more versatile for a variety of shooters.**



**The Mossberg Turkey's ventilated recoil pad absorbed recoil, not that there is a lot of recoil.**



**We liked the red-fiber-optic pipe front sight and the vent rib. They worked equally well when aiming or pointing.**



**We like the ambidextrous safety on the Model 500 because it was easy to manipulate with the thumb of the shooting hand.**

### .410 BORE RANGE DATA

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mossberg 500 Turkey** | **Federal Premium Heavyweight TSS 3 in., 13/16-oz., #9 shot** | **Aguila High Velocity 2.5 in., ½-oz., #6 shot** | **Federal Top Gun Sporting 2.5 in., ½-oz., #7-½ shot** | **Federal Steel Game & Target 3 in., ⅜-oz., #6 shot** |
| Pattern Size | 12 in. | 16 in. | 16 in. | 16 in. |
| **TriStar Viper G2** | **Federal Premium Heavyweight TSS 3 in., 13/16-oz., #9 shot** | **Aguila High Velocity 2.5 in., ½-oz., #6 shot** | **Federal Top Gun Sporting 2.5 in., ½-oz., #7-½ shot** | **Federal Steel Game & Target 3 in., ⅜-oz., #6 shot** |
| Pattern Size | 12 in. | 16 in. | 16 in. | 16 in. |
| **Stevens 301 Turkey Obsession** | **Federal Premium Heavyweight TSS 3 in., 13/16-oz., #9 shot** | **Aguila High Velocity 2.5 in., ½-oz., #6 shot** | **Federal Top Gun Sporting 2.5 in., ½-oz., #7-½ shot** | **Federal Steel Game & Target 3 in., ⅜-oz., #6 shot** |
| Pattern Size | 9 in. | 11 in. | 11 in. | 11 in. |

*To collect pattern data, we fired at a distance of 30 yards using Full chokes.*

hunting, know the shell's limitations. We tested at 30 yards, and in our pinion, that is pushing the outer edge of the .410's killing capability. We did, however, see some nice, dense patterns at 40 yards as we warmed up, but 30 yards and under would be our range with these guns. These guns are also lightweight, so 3-inch shells do produce some recoil. Start off with 2.5-inch shells for recoil-phobic shooters.

## How We Tested

We tested on pattern density and ease of use. While we concentrated on testing these guns for turkey hunting, we also looked at how well they might work for dove season and further looked at pointability, balance, and swing. To get a sense of shot patterns and pellets in the kill zone, we placed turkey-head targets at 30 yards. We also fired the shotguns at clay pigeons flung from a hand thrower.

We assembled a variety of .410 shotshells: 3-inch Federal Premium Heavyweight TSS rounds, which were 13/16-ounce in weight with #9 shot; Aguila High Velocity, 2.5-inch, ½-oz., #6 shot; Federal Top Gun Sporting, 2.5-inch, ½-oz., #7½ shot; and Federal Steel Game & Target 3 inch, ⅜-oz., #6 shot. We felt this was a good assortment of traditional lead, steel, and tungsten-alloy materials and shot and shell sizes.

The Federal Premium Heavyweight TSS is loaded to a factory muzzle velocity of 1100 fps. Federal uses a tungsten alloy that is denser than other tungsten loads and 56 percent denser than lead. That's important since the pellets need speed downrange to effectively kill a bird. We found this load to pattern densely at 30 yards and would use it for hunting turkeys. We also found the Federal Steel Game & Target 3-inch ⅜-ounce with steel #6 shot to pattern well but not as densely as the TSS at 30 yards. The Aguila High Velocity use a 2.5-inch shell and ½-ounce of lead #6s, and Federal Top Gun Sporting uses a 2.5-inch shell and ½-ounce of lead #7½ shot. The Federal load has a factory velocity of 1330 fps, and the Aguila has a factory muzzle velocity of 1100 fps. So these two shells are closely matched. We also found them to be quite effective on clay pigeons.

What we found was the combination of choke and shell really determined which shotgun was deemed best suited for turkey hunting. We felt all three could be employed effectively, but in our opinion, the Stevens was the best suited, followed by the TriStar and then the Mossberg. We would use the TSS load exclusively for turkeys, since it provided the best density through each of the shotguns tested. Holding a bead on a tom as you call him in close is the challenge with these .410 guns and a challenge some of our test teams would gladly accept. For wingshooting the TriStar excelled, followed by the Mossberg and then the Stevens. Both the federal and Aguila shells worked well, but know your range. Shooting doves with an open choke 12 gauge tests some shooters' wingshooting skills and a .410 leaves very little room for error.

We cranked through a lot of .410 shells while testing and don't have a sore shoulder to prove it, so here's what we learned about .410-bore turkey guns.

## Mossberg Model 500 Turkey 50109 .410 Bore, $303

This was a recent price at CheaperThanDirt.com. The mid-priced Mossberg 500 Turkey pump is built on

a receiver scaled for the .410. This is a pump-action repeater that uses Mossberg's renowned Model 500 dual-bar action, which is smooth, and if you ever spent time with a Model 500, a bit loose. The forend wiggles a bit, which we have found on nearly every Mossberg Model 500 we have ever tested. The stock is polymer with molded-in checkering at the pistol grip, and the butt is fitted with a ventilated recoil

## STEVENS MODEL 301 TURKEY OBSESSION 19253 .410 BORE, $179

## GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

**This 301 is a stripped-down, simple-to-use shotgun designed for turkey hunting, albeit with the proper loads. We liked the rail for mounting a red dot, its light weight, and price.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action Type | Break action, manual hammer, single-shot |
| Chamber Size | 3.0 in. |
| Overall Length | 41.5 in. |
| Capacity | 1 |
| Weight Unloaded | 5.07 lbs. |
| Weight Loaded | 5.15 lbs. |
| Buttstock | Textured synthetic, Mossy Oak Bottomland camo, solid recoil pad, sling studs |
| Buttstock LOP | 13.75 in. |
| Forend | Textured synthetic, Mossy Oak Bottomland camo |
| Barrel Length | 26.0 in. |
| Barrel | Blued, steel |
| Receiver | Blued, steel |
| Choke | 1 choke tube, extended, F |
| Sights | Brass bead, optic rail |
| Trigger Pull Weight | 5.4 lbs. |
| Safety | Manual hammer block |
| Warranty | 1-year limited |
| Telephone | (800) 370-0708 |
| Website | SavageArms.com |
| Made In | China |



**The 301 features an ejector that tosses empties well out of the way. We liked the rail for mounting a red-dot optic.**



**The extended choke tube allowed the no-frills Stevens shotgun to perform with tight patterns that measured as small as 9 inches at 30 yards.**



**The safety lever (arrow) blocks the hammer. It can be easily manipulated by right-handed shooters. When the red dot shows, the 301 is ready to fire.**



**The solid recoil pad slurped up recoil. Because the 301 is light in weight, 3-inch shells can produce some felt recoil.**

pad to suck up any recoil. The forend is thin in hand and shaped so it is easy to grip the slide and pump the action. The trigger group is black polymer and not camo finished. The safety is black plastic and ambidextrous. It worked easy under your thumb. The 26-inch barrel sports a vent rib and a red-fiber-optic-pipe front sight. There is a bead at mid rib, and it is black and unnoticeable. Just as well because

## TRISTAR VIPER G2 BRONZE 24181 .410 BORE, $667

### GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

**This Viper G2 ran on all types of loads. It swung and pointed well and would do well in the dove field as well as on turkeys with the right load. We liked the choke tubes instead of a fixed choke.**



| | |
|---|---|
| Action Type | Gas-operated, semi-automatic |
| Chamber Size | 3.0 in. |
| Overall Length | 48.25 in. |
| Capacity | 5+1 (2.5-in. shells), 4+1 (3-in. shells) |
| Weight Unloaded | 5.8 lbs. |
| Weight Loaded | 6.4 lbs. |
| Barrel Length | 28.0 in. |
| Barrel | Blued steel, vent rib |
| Receiver | Bronze-anodized alloy |
| Choke | 3 choke tubes, flush fit Beretta Mobil style, IC/M/F |
| Buttstock | Checkered walnut, gloss, solid recoil pad |
| Buttstock LOP | 14.38 in. |
| Forend | Checkered walnut, gloss |
| Sights | Red-fiber-optic tube |
| Trigger Pull Weight | 6.1 lbs. |
| Safety | Crossbolt |
| Warranty | 5-year limited |
| Telephone | (816) 421-1400 |
| Website | TriStarArms.com |
| Made In | Turkey |




**The TriStar logo is tasteful enough. Note the safety is a crossbolt type located behind the trigger. It works great for right-handed users.**



**We liked the red-fiber-optic front sight and the 5mm-wide vent rib. The top of the vent rib was checkered to reduce glare.**



**The choke tubes add versatility, making the Viper suited for upland and small-game hunting.**




**The bolt and controls are black and contrast nicely with the bronze receiver. The round black button required some effort to release the bolt when it was locked back.**




**The Federal Premium Heavyweight TSS shells loaded with tungsten #9 shot gave excellent performance across all three shotguns.**



**This is an average pattern from the Stevens 301 with Federal Premium Heavyweight TSS at 30 yards. This pattern had far more pellets in the kill zone than any other shotgun using the same ammo.**

the red optic is what you want to focus on for either aiming at a turkey or pointing at a dove. The barrel has a fixed choke, and we feel this does not provide the Mossberg the most versatility. We would have preferred choke tubes.

The entire shotgun has a Mossy Oak Bottomland camo finish that was well executed. The seam could be seen on the underside of the barrel and magazine tube where the camo film meets. We noticed the camo finish was scratched by the fore end because it wiggled and rubbed up against the barrel. The 500 also is equipped with sling swivels, which are helpful on a turkey gun for affixing a sling.

The trigger had a 6.06-pound pull weight, which was much too heavy, in our opinion. When you have a heavy trigger pull and lightweight gun, they tend to work against each other. The Mossberg was the heaviest of the shotguns tested at 6.5 pounds unloaded. Recoil was extremely pleasant due to the weight and the soft-rubber recoil pad. The LOP was under 14 inches, so it felt like a smaller shotgun but was still comfortable to shoot even for our tall-stature testers.

We achieved our tightest patterns — 12 inches — with the Federal TSS shotshells, but they were not as tight at the Stevens. The other loads patterned a consistent 16 inches at 30 yards. We would have liked choke tubes. The barrel wall is thick enough, and we feel Mossberg should consider adding choke tubes since it would make this 500 more versatile for turkey and wing shooting. The Mossberg swung well enough on clay pigeons, and we enjoyed dusting hand thrown targets with it.

The 500 was easy to load, though the .410 shells, due to their narrow diameter, take a bit more finesse to insert into the magazine tube. The ejection port is small, but it was easy to load shells one at a time. The tiny 500 ran well, and we enjoyed shooting it.

**Our Team Said: The 500 Turkey is a good pump repeater. The lack of choke tubes made this gun less desirable. The trigger was heavy. We'd take it turkey hunting with the TSS shells, but we make sure the bird was close enough. We'd also take this one dove shooting.**

### TriStar Viper G2 Bronze 24181 .410 Bore, $667

This was a recent price at BudsGunShop.com. The Viper G2 is a refined shotgun for the price point compared to other semi-autos. It is also the most expensive shotgun in this test, but in our opinion, it is worth the cost. The Viper G2 is a gas-operated semi-auto manufactured in Turkey by Armsan. We wanted to test a camo model to keep with the turkey hunting theme, but could only get the Viper G2 Bronze. Not a bad trade-off in our eyes, though the full camo model is available and with sling studs and for about $150 less. The Bronze model has a bronze weather-resistant Cerakote receiver that we thought looked sharp, even with the TriStar logo laser engraved on both sides. The 28-inch chrome-lined barrel is blued steel and features a 5mm-wide vent rib, three choke tubes, and a red-fiber-optic-pipe front sight. The removable choke system uses Beretta/Benelli Mobil threads and includes three choke tubes (IC, M, F), choke box, and wrench. There is also a magazine plug installed by the factory to limit capacity. It can easily be removed.

The Viper G2 sports high-gloss Turkish walnut with machine-cut checkering. The wood looked nice, and wood-to-metal fit was tight. The buttstock had a well-fitted rubber recoil pad with a hard insert at the heel to slide smoothly over clothing. It also comes with a shim kit so you can fine-tune the drop and cast to fit the shooter's stature.

The trigger group is black plastic. The safety is a crossbolt design located behind the trigger. It's in a good place if you are a right-handed shooter. The ejection port is large enough for fumble-free insertion of a tiny .410 shell. The magazine port on the bottom of the receiver is wide enough to comfortably allow an adult-size thumb to push shells into the magazine tube.

The G2 features a magazine cutoff that allows a user to unload a chambered shell while retaining shells in the magazine. To use the cut off, press upward on the elevator while retracting the operating handle. The bolt will travel far enough to eject the loaded shell but will not lock back. To lock the bolt rearward, press the small plunger at the front of the trigger guard, which allows the elevator return to its lowest position.

The trigger was a bit on the heavy side with an average pull weight of 6.1 pounds. What we did like about the trigger was that it was crisp with no take-up.

The gas-operated action is similar to Italian-style operating systems; it is a large spool-shaped piston pushing against a two-armed slide. When fired, gas exits the barrel through two ports and forces the piston, slide and bolt assembly rearward, lowering the locking block. This lets the assembly recoil, eject the empty and pick up a fresh shell on the return. What separates the TriStar from other .410 semi-autos is there is only one piston. There is no need to swap out the piston to match the load. We found the Viper worked well with light and high-velocity loads.

In hand, the Viper G2 feels lively. It is lightweight, so it is easy to swing and point. Again, we found the TSS shell provided the most dense patterns at 12 inches. Other loads produced a consistent 16-inch pattern. If we owned this shotgun we'd try a JEBS "HeadHunter" extra full extended choke tube ($100; JebsChokes.com) or some similar extended choke tube to tighten the pattern and provide us more confidence with shots at our outer range. The Viper G2 ran smoothly. We liked this shotgun a lot on hand-thrown targets. We mixed shells during testing in an effort to trip up the gas system, but it ran well. Recoil was virtually non-existent.

**Our Team Said: If you are looking for a fun-to-shoot .410 that's quite capable of turkey hunting and dove hunting, the TriStar is an excellent option. We'd opt for a tighter choke tube for turkey hunting and stick with TSS shells.**

### Stevens Model 301 Turkey Obsession 19253 .410 Bore, $179

This was a recent price at BassPro.com. The Stevens was the reason for this .410 test. It is a barebones single-shot break action manufactured in China. It reminded our testers of a variety of American-made single-shot shotguns made by H&R, Stevens, Savage and others in the mid- to late-20th century. These old-time guns and Model 301 are in the no-frills category of shotguns. The looks won't impress, but the dense patterns it shoots will.

The metal has a matte-black finish that is well executed. The 26-inch barrel has a brass-bead front sight. It also has a rail so a user could easily mount a red-dot scope. The barrel also features an extended Full choke tube. The tube is knurled and comes with a key to remove it.

The buttstock is polymer with Mossy Oak Bottomlands camo finish. A solid rubber buttpad is fitted quite well to the plastic stock. The fore end is also polymer and camo. It attaches and is removed via a button at the very front of the fore end. The stock and fore end are checkered, and sling studs are included.

Similar to an H&R action, the Stevens 301 has a checkered button on the right side of the receiver. Depress the button to open the action. The action on the 301 was as stiff as a pair of new, unwashed denim jeans. And like jeans, as we used the 301, it started to loosen up, but still required you to open the action with two hands and close it with two hands. The hammer is manual and must be thumbed back to fire the shotgun. The spur is serrated, and it takes a bit of effort to cock it back. With the hammer cocked back, you cannot open the action. The hammer needs to be fully forward to open the action.

On the left side of the receiver is a manual safety that blocks the hammer. It can easily be rotated with a right-handed shooter's thumb. A red dot appears, indicating the 301 is ready to fire. The trigger is crisp with no take up, and it broke at 5.4 pounds on average. It was the best

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trigger of the three shotguns tested. The trigger guard was black plastic.

In hand, the 301 feels tiny. The LOP was slightly smaller than the typical shotgun and that was fine for adults. Kids and small-stature shooters will still have to reach for the trigger. We thought the brass bead was fine, but would have preferred a red fiber optic. We did like the rail, and if we owned this shotgun, we would mount a red-dot sight and dial it in with the TSS load. We were impressed that this sub gauge could pattern as tightly as a 9-inch pattern on average. We counted more pellets in the kill zone with the 301 using TSS shells than the other shotguns, and that gave us the confidence the 301 paired with TSS ammo would get the job done. The other loads produced consistent 11-inch patterns at 30 yards. In fact, one tester wanted to purchase the 301 to further test the 301 on an actual hunt.

Wingshooting with the 301 showed the rudimentary nature of the gun. No vent rib, no red fiber optic, and very whippy, with some of us pulling through the target far too early at first. We eventually got into a rhythm with the 301. It would not be our first choice to bring to the dove field, though if pushed it could do an okay job.

Follow up shots were slow with the 301, and we ended up shooting it like a dangerous-game double gun. In our support hand, we held a fresh shell between our fingers as we grasped the fore end so reloads were a bit faster. The 301 uses an ejector system that launched empty shells a few feet away.

**Our Team Said: The 310 was the smallest and lightest of the three guns tested. In our opinion, the no-frills 301 allows you to concentrate on the hunt, calling in a tom closer. The shotgun worked quite well for a century old design. We think if you are dead set on trying the 410 for turkey hunting, the 301 is an inexpensive way to go.**

*Special thanks to Eastern Outfitters (EasternOutfitter.com) of Hampstead, NC, for their assistance.*

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

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