



SHOOT-N-IRON Academy



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Shoot-N-Iron Practical Shooting & Training Academy

I was walking the Police beat that was affectionately known in Shawnee, Oklahoma as the East End. There were thirteen bars located in the three and four hundred blocks of East Main in Shawnee on that August 1959 evening. The bars and sidewalks were full of people enjoying the cool evening after a very hot summer day. I stopped to light a cigarette before stepping out onto the sidewalk.

I saw a '58 Chevy pull up to the curb in front of the Pastime Bar, which was located two doors East of where I stood. As I walked toward the curb a man slid out from behind the wheel of the Chevy. As he stepped up onto the curb I saw he had a German Luger in his right hand. I quickly saw another figure in the doorway of the Pastime. It was the bar's owner. Both of these men knew each other very well. In fact the newly arrived man was the stepson of the man in the doorway. There had been a feud going on between them for a long time. My quick glance also spotted another pistol in the hand of the bar owner. Before I could do anything to prevent the coming fracas both men started blazing away at each other from a distance of only about ten feet. Bullets were flying everywhere. The smarter part of my upbringing directed me to dive behind the nearest parked car and I quickly did so.

After a couple of seconds the shooting stopped. I took a quick look, expecting to see one, if not both men lying in a bloody mess in the middle of the sidewalk. To my surprise, both men were still standing and they were trying to reload. I grabbed my pistol and forced both to drop their weapons. After taking both men into custody I learned that neither of them had gotten even a scratch. Later investigation showed the man with the Luger had fired seven rounds and the bar owner had fired five from his S&W .38 Chief Special. That counts up to twelve shots fired at almost point blank range. Nothing but buildings and a couple cars got hit.

It is a fact that handguns are really a pretty poor choice of weapons if one has to defend him or her self. Pistols don't usually produce the pinpoint accuracy that can be acquired with most rifles. Granted, most handguns are more accurate than most of us can shoot them, but they generally lack firepower and require a lot more practice for a person to become proficient. A good shotgun loaded with just about any shot configuration, when used at moderate to close ranges is a much better defensive weapon. In fact I consider the shotgun to be the worlds best hand-held equalizer. Most pistol calibers are not real good people-stoppers and may well require multiple hits to stop an attacker. The best things going for the handguns, is the fact that they can be concealed and carried easily and are available to us when the long guns are not. This makes the handgun number one for defense.

Handguns have been a big part of my life. I have carried and used them in line of duty for many years as a law enforcement officer. I have hunted big game with all sorts of different pistols. I've used rifles, pistols, and shotguns in competitions and exhibitions. I have been lucky in the fact that I have been able to have the right firearm for the purpose needed. Handguns are as much a part of my daily attire as are my pants and shirt. If I'm not packing a pistol I probably walk with a slight tilt from the lack of weight on the gun side. Needless to say I have a deep affection for my pistols.

Over the years while I was in Police uniform, I carried a double action sixgun most of the time. I started with an old S&W Military and Police .38 special snub-nose. I think I carried it because that gun was sort of a status symbol among cops in those days and just about everyone carried bright shiny nickel plated one with bone or some other fancy handles. It only took my involvement in one shootout and seeing the results of other shooting incidents to convince me that the .38 special was not what I wanted for a stopper caliber. There was nothing wrong with the guns themselves except I decided a little more barrel length would be a plus.

The .38 special loaded with a 158-grain lead round nose just didn't have the stopping power that I wanted. I started pulling the 158-grain bullets out of the Winchester ammunition that I was issued at the department and replaced the Winchester original powder with a hefty load of Hercules Unique. This turned the cartridge into a baby magnum. It worked well too, that is until the department caught on as to what I was doing and put the skids to my little project. Later, after some deliberation the brass approved the use of the various magnum calibers. As soon as that occurred I went to Art Mashburn's gun shop in downtown Oklahoma City and had him punch out the chambers in a S&W 38/44 Outdoorsman to .357 magnum. This caliber worked real well. I did this because I couldn't afford one of the S&W Model 27's at that time. I think they cost \$105.50 back then.

A few years later Smith & Wesson came out with the Model 19 Combat Magnum also in .357 magnum. My old friends Bill Jordan from the U.S. Border Patrol, Dan Combs from the Oklahoma Highway Patrol, Bill Rose (a State Game Ranger), and I all acquired three of the first such weapons to hit the street. These little blued, four inch barreled, sixguns were just what the doctor ordered. They were slightly smaller and lighter than the larger "N" frames. They were the same frame size as the old Military and Police snubnose .38 Special that I used to carry. This gun fit my short stubby hands much better. This gun had slightly more recoil when loaded with full house, Elmer Keith-designed .357's but it was still quiet manageable. I packed one of these beauties for most of my remaining career as a working cop. I liked the new gun so well that I traded Bill Rose out of his and then I had a pair. I think without a doubt the Model 19 or one of the later stainless steel versions dubbed the Model 66's are my all time favorite self-defense shoot-n-irons. I owe my life, several times over, to this quick handling wheelgun.

My love for the wheelgun does not take away the respect and devotion I have for some of the auto loaders. New designs have certainly enhanced the popularity of the autos. Most cops around this country as well as those from overseas have adopted one version or another of this type pistol as their sidearm of choice. High capacity is the key word now days. While I do like the extra rounds being available if needed, I am not an advocate of the "SPRAY & PRAY" method that I am afraid that is now in practice in a lot of places. When the high capacity autos in 9 mm came out, one gentleman who was a sort of friend (even though he sometimes was on the other side of the law) made the statement that he now had seventeen rounds in his new gun, and he thought that was enough to take me if it ever came right down to it. I advised him that I didn't give a damn how many rounds his gun held if I could get in the first shot. I'm not a real 9 mm fan. They sometimes seem to require too many hits on an adversary before stopping him.

For years I carried one of John Browning's 1911 autos in .45 ACP caliber as a backup. I usually kept one tucked under my coat with the wheelgun exposed in the duty holster on my belt. This combination worked real well and still does. I know I'll get some arguments from some folks when I say that a revolver is faster than the auto loaders, when coming out of the holster for the first six shots. There is nothing out there faster than a wheel gun for the first six. However the automatics reload much faster. Extra magazines for the autos that contain larger amounts of ammunition can be carried more easily. Now that I am not wearing a uniform with gun exposed, I normally carry one of my 1911 autos. They conceal easier and are slightly more comfortable. This caliber, loaded with a 230-grain bullet, is very adequate for most situations. If I feel the need for something more, I'll grab a shotgun.

I have acquired several auto loaders of different brands and calibers. I am currently packing another one of John Browning's other great designs in the old Browning Double Action auto that is now known as the SIG. I have one of these in .45 ACP. Right now I'm playing with a SIG Model P229. This little gun is

chambered in S&W .40, and I have a .357 SIG caliber barrel for it too, the latter not to be confused with the old .357 magnum. It is not the same critter. Barrels for the SW .40 and the SIG .357 are interchangeable, and the same magazines handle both cartridges. I like the performance of both. The 180-grain hollow points in the SW .40 do very well and the .357 SIG with a 125-grain hollow point moving at 1400 plus fps will do the job. I have been impressed with the gun's accuracy and reliability. The pistol's double action first shot design makes it quick to get into action and it's very easily carried.

Glock has a whole array of fine autos chambered for a bunch of calibers. I'll admit I don't care for the looks of these guns and I still have not gotten used to the plastic polymer material that these guns frames are made of. I have put several Glocks through about every test you can think of and they sure work. They'll feed almost anything you put in them. Accuracy is very good. Both carry comfortably and are very concealable. In short, they're a darn good handgun. One thing though: treat the gun with great caution when drawing the weapon or replacing it in the holster. It is not a gun to put into a purse or other device where articles such as car keys etc., are kept. With the safeties being located on the trigger tip they can be fired accidentally without much trouble. Caution on your part will take care of this matter very well. I, along with the Glock company, recommend that you shoot only jacketed ammunition in these guns. Excessive barrel leading can cause problems.

Springfield has come out with a very interesting little gun. It is dubbed the XD9 in 9mm and XD40 in S&W .40 caliber. They also have it in SIG .357. It has a lot of the features found on the Glock such as the safety on the trigger. They have added a grip safety to enhance safety in drawing and replacing the gun from or back into the holster. The grip is different than the standard designs and fits my hand well. It looks good from where I sit. I just acquired one and am now giving it a pretty hefty testing.

Another of my favorite handguns is the Smith & Wesson Model 29 in .44 magnum. When it's loaded with .44 special rounds it's an excellent defense gun. They have been putting down bad guys with these 240-grain rounds for well over a hundred years. I feel that the recoil of the full blown .44 magnum in the same bullet weight is a little too much in the recoil department for most folks to handle rapid fire. If you can handle it, it is one heck of a stopper. It does have more penetration than I feel is necessary for people. I prefer the magnum cartridge as a large game hunting round. It has been proven that when it's placed into the vital zone it will, and has, stopped every dangerous game animal on the North American Continent. I like to carry my short, four inch barreled Smith, but I really do a little better accuracy wise at the longer ranges with my old pre-1959 six and a half inch Smith & Wesson.

In .44 or the many other calibers offered do not forget the fine selection of sixguns and autos, both single and double action, that is available from Ruger. The late Mr. Bill Ruger designed and produced some of the best. I have at least one of almost every thing that Ruger has to offer. I have always thought, "If it's out there, I need to own one". I wish that were possible. I've been shooting my old model Super Blackhawk 44 magnum for more years than I can (or want) to remember. I modified the seven and one-half inch barrel back to an even six inches and remounted the front ramped sight. I think the gun shoots just as well as it did before the modification and handles much quicker and the balance is better. It is easier to belt-holster carry. My gun is the old model and I leave an empty chamber under the hammer for safety reasons unless I really feel that I may need the sixth shot.

Ruger came out a couple of years back with a smooth top single action sixgun called the Vaquero. Cowboy Action shooters as well as hunters all really like this gun. It's chambered in .357 magnum, .44-40, .44 Magnum and .45 long Colt. It comes in blue or stainless steel. All of Ruger's new models including the Vaquero and Blackhawks are equipped with a transfer bar safety system and are perfectly safe with the cylinder loaded full up. On a lot of hunting trips into the Rocky Mountains you will find either of these guns or one of my S&W 29's riding at the ready in a gun belt and holster of my own design. You know, I have dropped just a few critters with both.

In Oklahoma, I deer hunt with a four inch S&W Model 27 chambered in .357 magnum. This gun and cartridge is adequate for whitetail deer and most any other game that is found in these parts. This gun, when loaded with a soft cast lead Keith style 158-grain gas checked bullet ahead of 15 grains of Ralliant

2400 powder, is a real keeper. Recoil is very comfortable in the large frame pistol. It does a number on wild hogs in a big hurry if you put the slug in the kill zone. By the way I have also known of a number of one-shot stops that were made with this round on bad guy type banditos. In my opinion it's a dandy.

There are several handguns in the safe that I don't think I could live without. I have a couple of Smith & Wesson "J" frame pistols that I wouldn't want to part with. I have a little "Bodyguard" in .38 special that has occupied my pants pocket for many a mile. This little iron is accurate as heck and hides on my full figured body real well. It is about as handy as the pocket on a shirt. Smith & Wesson has come out now with basically the same gun in .357 magnum. I really think that this cartridge is a little stout, not for the gun but for the person holding it due to the small size of the weapon. I'll just stay with the .38 Special ammo in the Plus-P configuration. I've also owned another "J" frame for about forty years. This one is a 32/22 kit-gun in .22 LR. It has a 2-inch barrel with fully adjustable sights. This little gun is my squirrel- and rabbit-shooting pistol. It has accounted for more bushytails and cottontails than I can remember. To sell either one of these guns would be like selling an old friend. It's not gonna happen.

I guess everybody has their own favorites. You may favor handguns other than those mentioned here. Heck I probably like them too. I guess that if I were in a position of having to own one handgun other than one of the little .22's, I'd choose the Model 19 Smith & Wesson. It has always served me well and has never let me down. Whether you prefer the wheelguns or the autos, if you learn to use them and keep them clean and serviced, they'll stay with you and serve you well. Keep one handy, and keep shooting!
