



SHOOT-N-IRON Academy



CALIBERS FOR DEFENSE

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by Paul W Abel
Shoot-N-Iron Practical Shooting & Training Academy

If you want to start a good argument, just bring up the subject as to what is the best caliber to use for personal protection. Some people swear by the big boomers like the .44 Magnum while others look for something a little tamer. At the other end of the spectrum, I know several people who have defended themselves quite successfully with the little .22 Rimfire.

Many factors should be taken into consideration in choosing the right caliber. There is no question the big .44 Magnum is at the top of the list as far as power and penetration are concerned. It will blow a hole big enough to drive a truck through and then will continue on through anyone or most anything that is behind the targeted individual. Another drawback to the big magnum is the amount of heavy recoil it produces. Even those, and there are some, who can handle this hand-held cannon are slowed in getting off second and subsequent shots. I have heard it said that it takes only one shot from the big .44 to stop an adversary. While this is usually true, you may be faced with more than one attacker and then the extra time needed for recoil recovery may place you at risk. Most folks I know just can't handle it as quickly as is needed. Even though I dearly love the big magnum and shoot it regularly, there are many other excellent calibers out there that can do the job quite nicely without all the "buck and beller."

First, the handgun and the caliber must both fit you. A pistol that is physically too large to fit into your hand properly should be avoided. It is important when holding the gun the backstrap of the grip should be aligned straight with the wrist. The trigger finger should make contact with the trigger at approximately the middle of the first joint. This allows a natural, straight rearward pull. The distance or reach between the grip and trigger is very important. As we stated earlier, the caliber selected should be one you can handle comfortably. If you cannot shoot the pistol well because it doesn't fit your hand, or if you flinch from the recoil, you will, in all probability, miss and you can't afford any misses in a life and death situation.

While I feel that in most cases the .44 Magnum is a little over-powered for defense, the old reliable .44 Special has been doing the job very nicely since before the turn of the century. From the days of the Old West until modern times, this fine, old cartridge has proven itself to be worthy. Its soft lead 240-grain slug, traveling at 750 feet-per-second, will certainly give a feller a serious attitude adjustment. It is usually fired from a large- frame revolver and if you have small hands or prefer one of the autos, this can be a drawback.

One of the best cartridges out there is the old .45 Long Colt. It was originally designed for the single action "thumb buster" of the 1800's. This round is very popular with the Cowboy IPSC shooters and there is getting to be a bunch of those folks. The .45 LC is found in some of the modern day double action pistols too. This is probably one of, if not the best, man-stopping rounds out there. Its 250-grain, semi-flat nosed bullet, at 850 feet-per-second muzzle velocity, has proven itself beyond any doubt. Guns made for this cartridge are a little large for good concealment and carry comfort.

The old reliable .45 ACP, John Browning's slab-sided military 1911 semi-auto, is an excellent choice in my opinion. That is, provided you practice until handling it is totally second nature. The .45 ACP has been

stopping bad guys since about 1900. I suggest you replace the old 230-grain hardball ammunition with a good hollow point of modern design with a bullet weight of 200 to 230 grains. However, even the full metal-jacketed hardball is a proven winner. This fine old firearm and caliber will definitely do the job. For safety reasons, we do not recommend this weapon being carried in a "cocked and locked" condition in a ladies' purse or in a fanny pack. There are a large number of double-action firearms in many different designs, both large and small, available in this cartridge that work quite well.

In revolvers, the .357 Magnum is a good choice for many people. While the recoil is a little heavy, it is not prohibitive. Men with small hands and some women may find it a little hard to handle, but with practice and by trading the factory grips for a set of rubber grips that really fit, most people can master this caliber. Additionally, there is a large selection of handguns chambering this cartridge. I personally know of many one-shot stops provided by this round. It has been touted as one of the very best police calibers available. I had this round on my hip in a K-frame Smith & Wesson for thirty-three years and I never, ever, felt under-gunned in any situation.

The 10mm semiautomatics, in my opinion, are a little heavy in the recoil department for most folks. This is a real "stopper," but it has its share of shortcomings in that it is said to be hard on the firearm if extensive practice is done. The 10mm's little brother, the .40 S&W, is proving to be an excellent round for defensive use. Since its introduction a few years ago, police records show many one-shot stops. Recoil is within reasonable limits and accuracy is excellent. I feel that this is a very good choice for those who cannot handle the larger and more powerful calibers. This fine round is chambered in large, medium, and small semi-auto handgun designs and can be easily concealed.

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The 9mm is probably today's most popular defensive caliber. We see more people bringing handguns chambered in this round to our academy for training than any other. A large number of law enforcement agencies have adopted the caliber as their issue weapon. Manufacturers produce semiautomatics in many different models and sizes. The caliber is a little light, in my opinion, but it works. You may find it necessary to fire more than one shot to stop some adversaries. Weapons chambering this round range from large to very small and are easily concealed and transported. I highly recommend practice with standard velocity ammunition and the use of +P hollow point ammunition for serious defensive purposes. I recommend 115 to 125-grain bullet weights. We feel the muzzle velocity produced by the 147-grain bullets are too low and are not as effective. The 147-grain bullet was actually designed as a subsonic round for suppressed submachine guns used by the military, etc. If hit by ten to twenty rounds from a submachine gun, the bullet weight and velocity really doesn't matter.

The .38 Special, a baby brother of the .357 Magnum, has been around for a long, long time. It is chambered in more revolvers than probably any other caliber except .22 Rimfire. This cartridge will fire in both the pistols chambered for the .38 Special and the .357 Magnum however, the .38 Special revolver will not chamber the .357. In its standard velocity, and in the old round-nose designed bullet, the .38 Special is not the most effective round to be found. I feel that the .44 Special is a much better choice. With the development of the modern hollow point and +P ammo, the .38 Special has come to life. It's found in revolvers of all sizes, from the little compact J-frame S&W's, to Ruger and Colt snubbies, to the larger heavy weights. The small frames are extremely handy and concealable. Ladies especially like the smaller guns and this caliber because of its many loadings ranging from the lightweight and light recoil, mid-range wadcutter practice load, to the +P defensive cartridges. All in all, the .38 Special is not a bad choice.

The .380 or 9mm short is about the bottom of the spectrum as far as reliable stopping power. Chambered in a large number of small semi-automatics, this is a very popular round for the concealed carry group. Pistols chambered for this round can range in price from a few dollars to some of the high dollar designs like the Browning. Please remember you get what you pay for, and sadly, some of the cheaper guns are really more dangerous to the shooter than they are to the shootee. With the light bullet used for this

caliber and the low velocity produced, bullet placement becomes extremely important. Be prepared to use more than one shot if necessary.

I will not go into .32 or .25 calibers to any great extent. During my years in law enforcement I have seen several people shot with these calibers. In most of these cases the .32 and .25's just didn't do the job very well. I personally do not recommend either of these for defensive purposes. Both calibers are lacking in velocity and bullet expansion. I have actually seen a number of point blank shots in which the victim, even with serious wounds, was able to retaliate and win. In most cases the victims recovered. These rounds kill but are not good stoppers. Bullet placement is critical and chancy.

The .22 Rimfire Magnum is a potent and deadly cartridge. It works and is a much better cartridge in my opinion than either the .32 or .25 auto. I would not hesitate to act if I were armed with a good handgun chambering this round. Its older and smaller brother, the .22 Long Rifle cartridge, is one of the most deadly rounds that can be found. Even though this little bullet has no actual shock power, it's much like the .22 Magnum in that it fragments and does all sorts of bad things to the body. Both kill, but some times it takes a long while to accomplish the desired results. Doctors treating these wounds really have their work cut out for them due to small bleeders caused by lead fragments. Generally .22 caliber wounds are small and very difficult to treat.

I once heard a man say that any caliber will kill if the bullet is put in the right place. Another stated that any caliber works better than a pocket full of rocks. Both statements are quite true. But, if at all possible, carry a handgun that is chambered for the largest and most powerful cartridge you can handle comfortably, quickly, and well. You'll be glad you did if it ever becomes necessary to use one!
