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SMITH & WESSON MODEL 40

Described by Ian Fleming in *Dr. No* as a “brutal, stumpy revolver,” the S&W Model 40 Centennial certainly lived up to that billing. At least when compared to James Bond’s sleeker Walther PPK.

Produced from 1953 to 1974, the Model 40 .38 Special has recently been reissued as part of Smith & Wesson’s Classic series.

It’s a blued honest-to-God carbon-steel J-frame with a true hammerless design and grip safety—an updated heir to the old S&W Safety Hammerless (also called the Lemon Squeezer). Naturally, it’s a two-inch (OK, 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ if you want to get spec-table-technical about it).

I’ve shot originals, and the only difference here is that the new Model 40 has checkered stocks instead of the smooth ones on the old Centennial.

The weight is a hair over 20 ounces, so the gun is marginally heavier (by five ounces or so) than the company’s current alloy hammerless J-frame shorties such as the Model 442 Airweight.

The Model 40 is rated for Plus-P ammo, but that certainly doesn’t mean you shouldn’t practice with lighter stuff, which is what I’d do if I wanted to shoot one extensively.

I rounded up a pretty diverse assortment of ammo to run through the gun. Before getting down to grouping and chronographing, I fired about 50 rounds

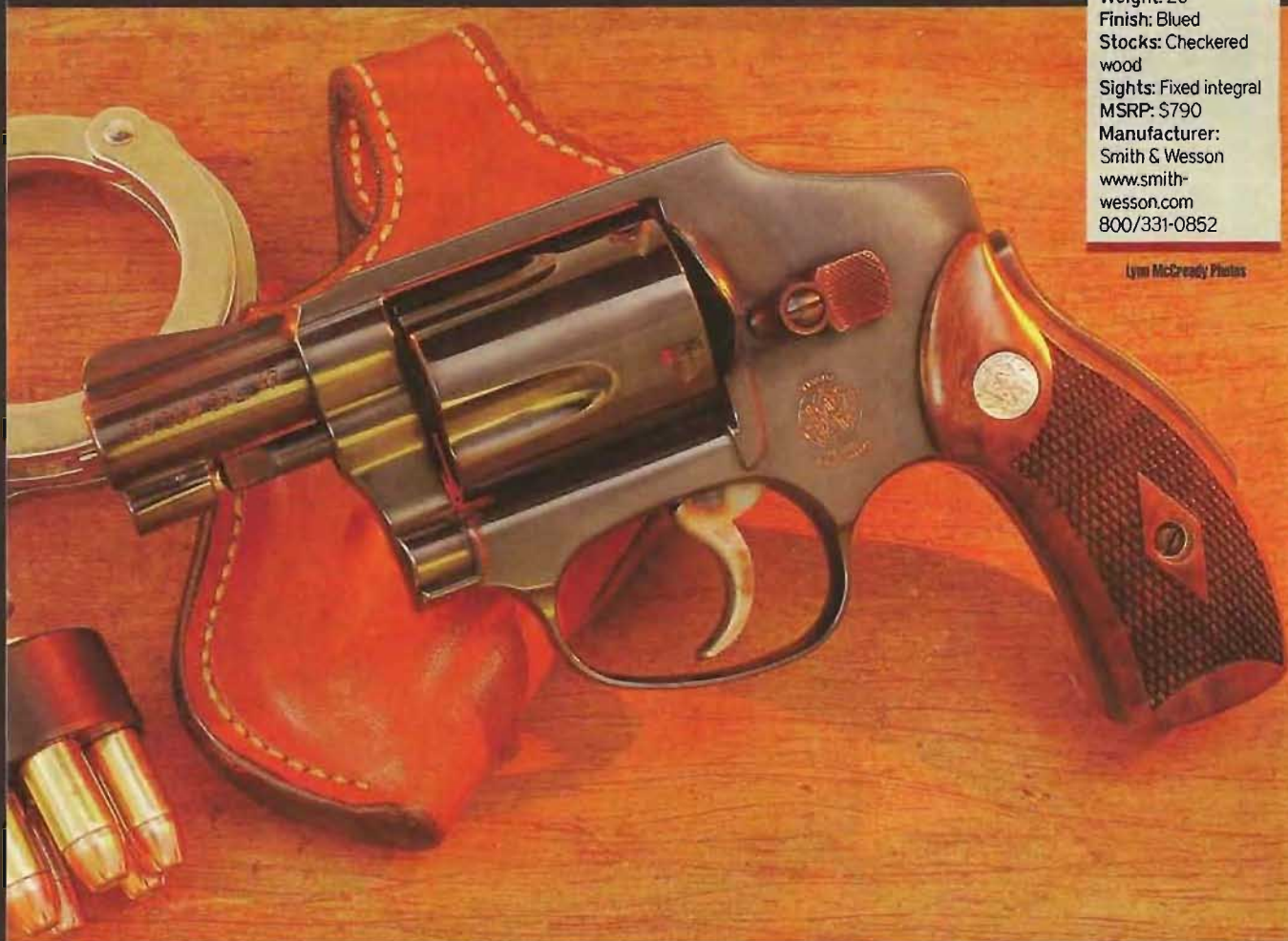
at some reasonably short-range gongs to get the feel of things—notably, the grip safety and trigger.

Now, the grip safety didn’t give me any problems, but I was always conscious of getting my grip right while firing the gun. Because the grips on a J-frame are so small, however, and somewhat round in cross-section (in comparison to a 1911), it’s not inconceivable that a shooter

S&W MODEL 40

Type: Double-action-only revolver
Caliber: .38 Special
Capacity: 5
Barrel length: 1.8
Overall length: 6.9
Weight: 20
Finish: Blued
Stocks: Checkered wood
Sights: Fixed integral
MSRP: \$790
Manufacturer: Smith & Wesson
www.smith-wesson.com
800/331-0852

Lynn McCready Photos



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Photo by Payton Hillier

The relatively skimpy stocks on the Model 40 necessitate a firm grip so as to depress the grip safety (inset).

could fail to depress the safety properly should the grips squirm around.

Of course, you could sidestep the issue by simply taping down the safety, but it seems to me that a more aesthetic option might be to get a Tyler T grip adapter to make things a little more hand-filling. And the nice thing about the Tyler T is that you can still use a speedloader—something that can't be said for many bulkier aftermarket grips.

The trigger was manageable, breaking at around 11 pounds with a very short, consistent stroke.

Although 25 might seem a stretch for a two-inch snubbie, I managed to get pretty good results with several of the loads I brought, notably Black Hills' 125-grain JHP Plus-P, Hornady's 140-grain XTP/JHP and Buffalo Bore's intriguing 150-grain Heavy Hard Cast Wadcutters. These three all produced five-shot groups at under 3 1/2 inches, with my "best of show" being a two-inch group with the Hornady XTPs. The 125-grain loads hit slightly lower than my six o'clock point of aim, while the heavier 158s hit anywhere from four to six inches higher.

However, point of impact with any load

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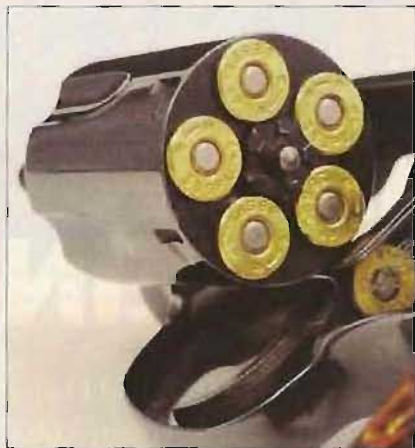
The Model 40 is a true hammerless design, unlike the Model 649 Bodyguard, which features a vestigial cocking piece.



The Model 40 grouped best with (left to right) Black Hills' 125-grain Plus-P JHP, Buffalo Bore's 150-grain Heavy Hard Cast Wadcutter and Hornady's 140-grain JHP-XTP.

Used at a more realistic 21 feet was uniformly in spec.

I chronographed everything I shot with the Model 40 as well as an S&W Model 15 K-frame four-inch for purposes of comparison (see the nearby chart). The only thing that was flat-out jarring from the snubbie was Buffalo Bore's Heavy Plus-P 158-grain SWHC load, which clocked an astonishing 966 fps from the Model 40 and an even more jaw-dropping 1,120 fps from the four-inch Model 15 (I would *not* use these in any non-Plus-P rated .38).



Like all of S&W's J-frames, the Model 40 features a five-shot cylinder. It is rated for Plus-P .38 Special ammo.



Photo by Payton Miller

Although 25-yard shooting isn't what the Model 40 was designed for, this group—shot with Hornady's 140-grain JHP-XTPs—shows that short barrels are no less inherently accurate than longer ones. But that short sight radius makes things tougher on the shooter.

It's good to see S&W paying attention to the J-frames as far as the company's retro-themed Classic series goes. I have no idea how long the Model 40 Centennial is going to be back on line, but here's hoping it's around for a while. —Payton Miller

CHRONOGRAPH RESULTS*

Load	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Avg. Velocity (fps)	Extreme Spread (fps)	Standard Deviation
Win./USA LRN	150	691 (738)	74 (58)	27.7 (19.7)
Win. Supreme SXT +P	130	826 (935)	88 (61)	31.5 (22.7)
Win. Super-X LSWHP +P	158	768 (887)	79 (46)	25.3 (15.6)
Rem. Golden Saber +P	125	884 (1,028)	29 (63)	9.9 (20.6)
Black Hills JHP+P	125	820 (916)	30 (59)	11.7 (20.6)
Buffalo Bore HCLWC**	150	889 (996)	20 (32)	6.9 (11)
Buffalo Bore LSWHC +P	158	966 (1,120)	39 (66)	14.9 (21.4)
Hornady XTP-JHP	140	714 (743)	16 (46)	6.9 (15.3)

*Velocity recorded 10 feet from the muzzle using a Competition Electronics Pro Chrono. Numbers in parenthesis are from a four-inch-barreled S&W Model 15 for comparison. Abbreviations: LRN, lead roundnose; LSWHP, lead semiwadcutter hollowpoint; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; HCLWC, hard-cast lead wadcutter; LSWHC, lead semiwadcutter hollow cavity. ** Short Barrel Low Flash

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