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# Smith and Wesson's 'Retro' Revolver

**A new version of an old revolver, the Model 21, that really  
does the business**

**By Bob Campbell**



**The Model 21 .44 Special is "lively in the hand," says the author,  
and "responds well to a trained shooter."**

**W**hen I think survival tool I have more of a basis for  
procedure than most.

Having engaged in interpersonal combat and more or less  
prevailed—some were draws and in some cases I felt like I  
was run over by a Mack Truck—I understand the essential

very much, unless you have a Brinks truck full of money following you around.

My favorite 250-grain SWC bullets strike a bit high at 16 yards. I switched to a 215-grain bullet from Magnus cast bullets and I was in business. These bullets work well with the dead-on hold. The Sierra 180-grain JHP has also given good results in the hotter handloads. In factory loads anything over 200 grains strikes high. With the Cor Bon 165-grain JHP, a good personal defense load, the dead-on hold may be used. With the Cor Bon 200-grain DPX the six o'clock hold works.



The LAW holster basically conforms to the shape of large handguns. Originally designed to conceal a four-inch barrel .44 Magnum revolver, the LAW has no problem with the Model 21 .44 Special.

In no case were there excess pressure signs or sticky extraction with any of the loads used.

The Model 21 works just fine with the heaviest commonly available factory loads including the 250-grain Keith load from Buffalo Bore at just over 1,000 fps.

I found the round-butt Model 21 comfortable to fire. I gave the revolver a real workout at the silhouette target, putting big holes in the man-sized targets at seven yards. At this range sight regulation is just fine for any of the loads tested, they all tend to cut a single ragged hole.

Get this straight: handguns are not very powerful and accuracy can make up for power. The Model 21 is accurate enough for defense if you do your part.

I found the revolver very controllable. There was little

subjective difference in my mild handloads and the Cor Bon personal defense loads. I would regard the 165-grain JHP from Cor Bon as the ideal urban load. This load is traveling at well over 1,000 fps, enough to instigate upset in the wide mouth hollowpoint bullet. And expansion has proven very reliable in all media I have subjected to this test. As a bonus, the load produces good accuracy. I was surprised, as the light load has less bearing surface.

Just the same, the Cor Bon 165-grain JHP proved to be very accurate and while it is chance that this is the one load that allowed a perfect dead-on hold, this was a fortunate happenstance.

A solid choice for those preferring more penetration is the Cor Bon 200-grain DPX load. This load uses the Barnes X bullet and offers good expansion with greater penetration and strikes to the point of aim with a six o'clock hold. This load, like the 165-grain JHP, cuts a single ragged hole at 15 yards—if I do my part.

The Model 21 is not a small handgun but it is lighter and more compact than the heavy barrel .44s so popular with the hunting crowd. The Model 21 is lighter by two ounces than a Government Model 1911 and packs pretty neatly.

Since the LAW holster was originally designed to conceal a four-inch barrel Smith and Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum, the Model 21 .44 Special was no challenge. There is even a choice of forward or rear rake adjustment in this holster. For concealed carry I think this is a good choice.

For carry under a sport coat or jacket, the DeSantis belt scabbard is another good choice. DeSantis is well known as a first class holster maker who supplies thousands of holsters to a number of federal agencies. You do not win such a contract for nothing. The holster I chose is well tanned, with excellent stitching, and a secure thumbbreak. While designed for concealed carry, this holster is also suitable for field use.

If you are looking for a good handgun for defense against animals, the Model 21 is a neat handgun to keep handy. I recommend the Buffalo Bore Keith load for this task. Jolting a 250-grain hard cast semi-wadcutter to well over 1,000 fps, this is a powerful load that makes the most of the .44 Special.



"The combination of a .44 Special revolver and DeSantis holster is surprisingly light on the hip," Campbell says. "This is good kit for personal defense."

As a hunter's backup the Model 21 is ideal. There are better choices for hunting, but if you wish to keep the hunt in hunting and limit your shots to 35 yards or so, the Model 21 would work just fine. For thin skinned game I would recommend the Buffalo Bore 180-grain JHP at a true 1,200 fps.

These heavy loads certainly get your attention but in no case were they painful to fire and use.

Nostalgia is a good reason for owning a new Model 21, but I suspect quite a few will see use as personal defense handguns. If you wish to keep an example beside your pillow you may quickly grasp the piece and you are good to go without racking a slide cocking a hammer or taking a safety off.

The .44 Special will get the attention of those who misbehave. This is simply a no-lose situation. ●

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