

In the 1980s, police departments all over the country started trading in their Smith & Wesson revolvers for Smith & Wesson autoloaders. S&W semi-autos seemed to dominate the law enforcement markets at first, but eventually lost market share to other manufacturers of high-capacity “wonder-nines,” especially Glock. Eventually the law enforcement and civilian markets shifted to a preference for polymer frames with no external thumb safety. S&W tried to adapt to the market with the Sigma series, and then the SW99 collaboration with Walther. While neither of these models presented a serious challenge to the Glock market dominance, S&W kept working. The latest incarnation of the wonder-nine is S&W’s Military & Police 9mm, known as the M&P 9. It appears to me that S&W has finally hit the wonder-nine bull’s-eye.

The “M&P” moniker is a resurrection of the name given to S&W’s old “Military & Police” revolver in .38 Special, which is ironic for such a modern pistol. The new M&P line consists of revolvers, autoloaders and rifles—all designed for military, law enforcement or civilian defensive use. Being a long time fan of Smith & Wesson revolvers, I was anxious to get my hands on some M&P pistols to see if the new guns justified the marketing hype. In due course I obtained both a full-size and a compact M&P in 9mm for testing.

Gun Details

The M&P pistols are truly modern twists on an established design. The M&Ps are polymer framed guns that are striker-fired with a double-action type trigger—and no thumb safety. All the models have standard equipment rails to attach a tactical light or laser. And, all feed from double-stack high capacity steel magazines—with 17 rounds for the full-size 9mm, and 12 rounds for the compact 9mm. What is more interesting, however, are the features that make the M&P different, and better, than other similar designs, like the Glock.

First, all the M&Ps come equipped with three interchangeable backstraps to tailor the grip to fit a particular shooter’s hands and grip preferences. This important feature is lacking in many polymer framed guns. In fact, shooters complain so often about the Glock grip size and shape that



FULL-SIZE M&P 9MM

SMITH & WESSON M&P 9MM: REFINEMENT OF THE WONDER-NINE



M&P 9MM AFTER CUSTOM WORK



SMITH & WESSON M&P 9MM SPECS

	FULL-SIZE	COMPACT
Capacity	17+1	12+1
Barrel Length	4.25 in.	3.50 in.
Overall Length	7.50 in.	6.70 in.
Sight Radius	6.40 in.	5.75 in.
Height	5.50 in.	4.30 in.
Width (Slide/Frame)	1.08/1.20 (in.)	1.08/1.20 (in.)
Weight (Empty)	24 oz.	21.7 oz.

a whole cottage industry has arisen to help you grind plastic off your Glock frame to fit your grip properly. With the M&P, you can interchange backstraps in a matter of seconds to accommodate your preferred grip.

The M&P is also very easy to operate with either hand. The slide stop can be operated on either side of the gun. The magazine release is reversible, and can be moved to either side of the gun. And, of course, there is no thumb safety. This makes the gun easily adaptable to south paws, and considerably easier to use with the weak hand if necessary.

The double-action type trigger is similar to the Glock "safe action," with no external safety. However, the trigger safety on the M&P is by virtue of a hinged trigger assembly, as opposed to an independent lever inside the trigger face. To me, this trigger design seems more natural and easier to manipulate. The trigger pull itself is also quite good, measuring in at a smooth 6.5 pounds

from the factory. The trigger can be made much better though—more on that later.

As further proof that S&W was listening, the M&P pistols can be field stripped for cleaning without pulling the trigger. Glocks have come under a lot of criticism because the trigger has to be pulled to release the striker tension

before the gun can be disassembled. While this shouldn't matter one bit to anyone who is competent to handle firearms, S&W designed the M&P with a sear deactivation lever for disassembly—no dry firing required, and less possibility of an accidental discharge. This will undoubtedly warm the hearts of police bureaucrats across the country who don't believe their officers are capable of clearing their weapons properly.

The factory sights are steel Novak Lo-Mount sights of the "three white dot" variety, and are quite decent. Tritium night sights are available from the factory as well. As factory sights go, these are quite good. The gun also has a very useful loaded chamber indicator—an actual hole in the top of the slide that permits inspection of the chamber. While I have never trusted mechanical "loaded chamber indicators," this style is quite useful. I can actually see the brass casing to verify the presence of a round in the chamber. Finally, the stainless steel M&P slides are finished in Black Melonite—a very hard and corrosion resistant finish.

This collection of innovative features made for a very promising design—if it worked. It was time to go to the range and see...

Continued on page 32



DISCREET CARRY SHIRTS

Discreet Shirts for concealed carry.



WWW.ROGUEELITE.NET

610-246-4000

ELITE VESTS



Pockets for all your utility needs

See our website for the new styles and colors

ALL PRODUCTS AND SIZES LISTED ON WEBSITE ARE IN STOCK

The New Standard in Concealed Carry and Tactical Apparel

DISCREET CARRY PANTS

Discreet pants with wide pockets for easily accessing gear.



WOOLRICH® ELITE SERIES TACTICAL



M&P 9MM COMPACT WITH X2L

Shooting Impressions

Over the course of a few months, I put 1,500 rounds through a full-size and a compact M&P. I also passed the guns around to a number of experienced shooters and got their impressions as well. I even took the full size M&P to a one day intermediate handgun class put on by one of my favorite trainers—Randy Cain of Cumberland Tactics (www.guntactics.com). That training course was a 650 round torture test of shooting for maximum speed and accuracy. My conclusion is that these guns work. My guns were not handpicked guns from the factory, both were both bought off the shelf—and both ran perfectly.

The consensus of my informal testers was that these guns are some of the softest shooting 9mms they have shot. I have to agree. Both the full size and the compact are remarkably easy to shoot. The grip angle is quite natural, the grip size is comfortable for a wide range of hands, and the trigger is very easy to manipulate. I think the M&Ps live up to the hype. You won't be disappointed in the handling of these guns compared to any other guns in this category.

As for accuracy, both models are very impressive. Neither gun has any problem with consistent hits on pie plates at 25 yards. The full size had no problems at 35 yards. Both guns could also make consistent hits on a steel silhouette at 100 yards, so long as the shooter does his part. Do you need more than that for combat accuracy? I think either one of these guns will shoot with as much accuracy as you can manage.

Beyond the Box

The M&P is a great pistol out of the box. However, there is always room for some improvement. After initial testing

of the M&Ps, I sent my full size off for some special attention by Dan Burwell at Burwell Gunsmithing in Pennsylvania. Dan is making a name for himself in customizing M&P pistols, and for good reason. Dan has a full list of M&P services, but I opted for just a few. First, he re-stippled my grips with a custom "sharkskin" pattern that greatly improved the grip, especially when your hands get wet with sweat. He also did a trigger job, smoothing and lightening the trigger to a 3.5 pound pull. I love the improvement to the gun, and other trigger weights are available if requested. The 3.5 pound pull is still quite safe—the length of travel of the trigger pull remains unchanged.

Dan has also engineered his own replacement rear sight. His rear sight is exactly what I like – a flat black serrated face with no dots. When mated with the S&W factory front night sight, this makes a great combination. The sight is also designed to permit one-handed cycling of the slide, another nice feature. Finally, I asked Dan to have my slide and barrel refinished in a nickel-Teflon finish. This was mostly a matter of personal preference and aesthetics, since the factory Black Melonite finish is very tough.

Dan's work made a great gun even better, and exactly what I wanted. His service was top-notch, his prices very reasonable, and his turn-around time is one of the shortest you will find in this business. If you pick up an M&P, I highly recommend taking advantage of Dan's work. Some of the upgrades can be done yourself, or with the help of a local gunsmith, just by buying the parts—like the stippled grip inserts or the replacement rear sight. For more information, check out www.burwellgunsmithing.com, or give Dan a call at (814) 932-4792.

The M&P Compact was my first sub-compact with a light rail, so I decided to search out a small weaponlight to fit. While I am not a huge fan of weapon-mounted lights for carry guns, I do like them on guns used for home or car defense. Insight Technologies sent me their X2L, which was a perfect fit. The X2L not only projects a bright white light, but also a laser. I like the combination of light and laser, and the X2L is a well-built unit that performs very well. I think the X2L adds a lot of versatility to this sub-compact gun. I also tested the Insight Technologies M3X Tactical Illuminator on the full-size M&P, and I was impressed with this unit as well. The M3X cranks out 125 lumens with a one hour run time, while housed in

a shock-proof and waterproof unit built to take serious abuse. I particularly like the "Slide Lock" rail mounting system on both lights, which make removal and replacement quite easy. I recommend the Insight Technologies products to you, and you can find additional details at www.insightlights.com, or call (877) 744-4802.

Final Thoughts

Smith & Wesson has a winner with these M&P pistols. In my opinion, the M&P pistols represent the modern interpretation of the wonder-nine. While Glock has sat on their "perfection" for decades with only minor changes, S&W is innovating. While some will say, and accurately so, that the M&P doesn't yet have the track record of reliability—I think that is coming. Certainly the guns I tested worked very well, and are fully covered by S&W's lifetime repair policy.

As between the full-size and the compact, rumor has it that the compacts are outselling the full-size models by a wide margin—no doubt to satisfy the demand for civilian concealed carry guns. While the compact is slightly harder to shoot just because of the smaller grip and shorter sight radius, it packs a lot of firepower into a manageable size. Ultimately, you should probably have one of each! At a street price of around \$500, you could buy both, have them fit to your own specifications, and still spend less than buying a well-tuned 1911. And, if you just have to have a caliber that starts with a "4," the M&P is available in .40 S&W and .45 ACP. If you have gotten away from S&W autoloaders, or been seduced by the previous wave of wonder-nines, now is the time to come back to S&W. Try the M&P, and I think you will like it.



Links

www.burwellgunsmithing.com
www.guntactics.com
www.insightlights.com
www.smith-wesson.com

Duane A. Daiker, is a Contributing Editor for CCM, but is otherwise a regular guy, not much different from you. Duane has been a lifelong shooter and goes about his life as an armed, responsible, and somewhat opinionated citizen. Duane can be reached at Daiker@RealWorldCarryGear.com. His other feature articles and Real World Carry Gear columns can be viewed at www.RealWorldCarryGear.com. Photography by Duane Daiker.