

THE SMITH & WESSON 3913 TSW

In the 1980s, when police departments across the country started trading in their Smith & Wesson revolvers, they looked to a familiar source for their new 9mm autoloaders—Smith & Wesson. The first generation S&W semi-autos were standard issue for law enforcement officers across the country, with full size, double-stack “wondernines,” like the Model 59 for patrol officers, and more compact versions like the 69 and the 39 for detectives and plain-clothes types. These early autoloaders paved the way for many more, and the wheelguns were eventually considered to be obsolete for modern law enforcement. The S&W semi-auto guns evolved and improved, but were also met with stiff competition from other manufacturers. While the S&W guns are still in wide use by law enforcement, other guns like Glock and Sig Sauer seem to garner far more attention these days.

Since the late 1990s, however, the firearms market has changed dramatically. The passage of “right to carry” legislation in states across the country has resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilians having the ability to carry concealed firearms. A whole new market has exploded, as

civilians eschewed traditional full-size guns and gravitated to smaller, thinner, lighter and easier to carry guns. It seems now that firearms companies rush to market every year with new compact designs for concealed carry.

While S&W certainly arms a very large portion of the CWP holders in this country, it is most noticeably with their lightweight snub-nose revolvers. S&W autoloaders are often overlooked by the gun magazines and the glitterati of the firearms community as old news. However, S&W autopistols, and in particular, the 3913 and related models, have an almost cult-like following that is not often discussed. This is a modern interpretation of a classic firearm that deserves your consideration.

The Specs:

The particular gun reviewed here is the 3913 TSW. The “TSW” moniker is marketing-speak for “Tactical Smith & Wesson.” The TSW pistols are the top of the line guns that have slightly different sight packages and different checkering, and later models all sport a tactical light rail. This same, basic gun has also been

recently offered as a “standard” 3913, and is currently offered as a “value model” 908 and 908S. In the past, this same basic gun has been made as a Model 39, and later as a 439, 639 and perhaps others. One attractive aspect of these guns is that many, many of them have been made over the years, so they can be found relatively easily on the used market.

The 3913 TSW is a single-stack 9mm, meaning the magazine is designed to hold only a single row of ammunition. In a world of double-stack Glock, Beretta, Sig and H&Ks, the single-stack 9mm has become a bit lost in the crowd. While capacity is “sacrificed” to a mere 9 rounds (8 rounds in the magazine, plus one in the chamber), the benefits abound. A thin gun is much easier to carry and conceal. The grip portion of a gun is usually the most difficult portion to hide, and the bulk of a double-stack 9mm grip can be problematic. The 3913’s grip is adorned with very thin, but decent looking plastic grips and is approximately one inch wide—quite svelte. The slide measures only .9 inches across, although that width is increased by the width of the slide-mounted safety lever.

By: Duane A. Daiker

A PROVEN PERFORMER



3913 TSW SPECIFICATIONS

Caliber	9mm
Length	6.75 in.
Width (of slide)	0.9 in.
Height	5.0 in.
Barrel Length	3.5 in.
Magazine Capacity	8+1
Sight Radius	5.6 in.
Weight Empty	24.8 oz.
Trigger Pull (DA/SA)	10 lbs. / 3 lbs.

The 3913 comes configured with what S&W calls “traditional double-action” or TDA. In the TDA configuration, the gun has an ambidextrous, slide-mounted, de-cocking/safety lever. The gun is designed to be carried with the hammer down, requiring a long, double-action pull to fire the first shot. All subsequent shots are single-action, with a bit of take-up, but a reasonably lightweight pull. The gun can be carried with the safety on (requiring the disengagement before firing the gun), or with the safety off (relying on the weight of the double-action trigger pull for safety). This is a matter of personal preference and training. If you don’t care for a safety, S&W can convert the gun to a “de-cock only” configuration with no safety. If you just don’t like levers at all, and don’t mind the double-action trigger pull, S&W can convert the gun to a true “double-action only” with no protruding levers at all.

This S&W does not have a factory key-lock, which is appreciated by many. It does have a “loaded chamber indicator,” which consists of a small hole in the barrel at the top of the ejection port that will show if a piece of brass is present. Not a bad thing to have, but you should never rely on a visual inspection through a tiny hole to determine if your gun is loaded. On a more controversial note, this gun also has a magazine disconnect safety. The gun cannot be fired without a magazine in place. Some believe this is an undesirable, unnecessary safety feature that may, for instance, prevent you from being able to fire a round in the midst of a tactical reload if necessary. Others appreciate the magazine safety as a way of essentially disabling the gun if in danger of being lost in a struggle. That is your call to make, and the safety could theoretically be disabled, although I would never suggest that you do so.

The 3913 is equipped with Lo Mount Novak 3-dot sights that provide a clear sight picture. Night sights are available for upgrade, although the guns are not offered to the civilian market with factory night sights. The gun also comes with two high quality magazines that have finger-rest bases, clearly numbered index holes, and a high-contrast, orange follower. Spare magazines are a bit pricey (about \$40 from S&W), but I have had great luck with the much cheaper Mec-Gar units. The TSW models also have an integrated light rail for a weapon mounted light. A gun-mounted flashlight won’t solve all your lighting problems (a topic for another day), but it can be nice to have.

All in all, the 3913 is a very solid, well put-together gun in a proven design. Take-down is relatively simple, and proper maintenance should not be a problem. Most importantly, the gun is backed with the S&W Lifetime Repair Policy and S&W’s legendary customer service.

But...does it shoot?

Yes! The 3913 TSW digested several types of ammo, including my carry favorites, Gold Dot 115 grain JHPs, with no problems at all. These guns are not typically very ammo sensitive, and this particular example certainly was not. I have personally put over 500 rounds of assorted ammo through the gun used for this review without a single malfunction of any kind. The gun is rated for 9mm +P ammo, and seems to handle it without any problems.

The TSW shoots very well for me. I think it is a combination of a nicely ergonomic, single-stack grip, good sights, and a pretty decent single-action trigger.

Double-stack 9mms have been the rage for so long, that I had almost forgotten how nice a single-stack 9mm fits my hand. Obviously, the fit may be different for you, but I like it. The Novak sights also help put this gun easily and quickly on target. The trigger pull on this gun leaves a bit to be desired, but it is still quite workable. The double-action is heavy, although reasonably smooth. Fortunately, most of your shooting is likely done in single-action, which is a lot more manageable. There is little take-up and a short reset, making the gun easy to shoot, whether slowly for accuracy or for quick follow-ups. A bit of attention from a decent gunsmith could make the DA trigger quite a bit better, resulting in faster and better first shots out of the holster. Of course, you will always have to train and pay special attention to mastering the transition from the first DA trigger pull to the following SA trigger pulls, which is a common problem on traditional, double-action guns. This skill, like any other, is acquired through training and practice.

I don’t find a lot of value in firing concealed carry guns from a bench rest at 25 yards. The target shown was fired without support in singles and pairs at 30 feet. This gun is more than capable of good combat accuracy. The “9 Tactical” will do its job if you do.

Conclusion

I would not presume to tell you what gun you should carry. I can’t tell you what model will fit your hands or your lifestyle. I can tell you, however, that the S&W 3913 is worth your consideration. It is not the latest, the highest tech, or the most popular concealed carry firearm on the market. Unlike a Glock, you can’t walk into any gun show and buy hundreds of accessories and do-dads to hang off of your gun (of course, whether you need any of those things is another topic for another day). And yet, the S&W 3913 TSW and its closely related kin have been out quietly doing their jobs for decades, and they are worth a close look in your quest for the perfect carry gun.

About the Author

Duane A. Daiker is a Contributing Editor for CCM, but is otherwise a regular guy, not much different from you. Duane has been a life-long shooter and goes about his life as an armed, responsible, and somewhat opinionated citizen. Duane authors a regular column in CCM entitled Real World Carry Gear. Duane can be reached at:

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