

1,000-Yard Shootout: .300 WSM vs .300 Win Mag

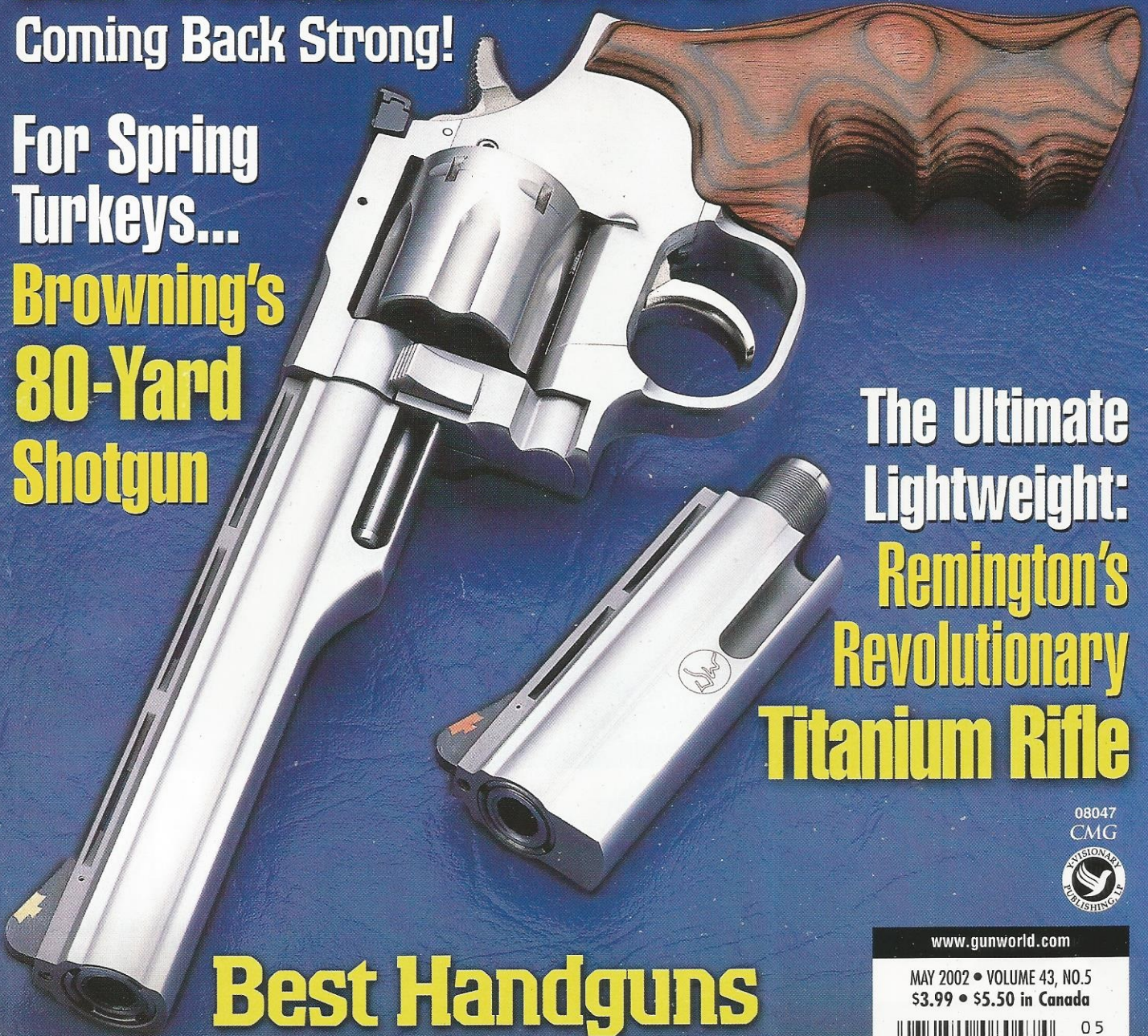
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The new and improved Dan Wesson Firearms rendition of the Dan Wesson revolver design is a beautiful revolver. Trzoniec received a Pistol Pack with four different barrel/shroud assemblies, extra stocks and assorted accessories for evaluation.

DAN WESSON REVOLVERS: COMING BACK STRONG!

More finely made than ever, they're ready for hunting, defense and competition!

By Stan Trzoniec

The first time I handled a Dan Wesson revolver back in the late '60s, I found it very unattractive and most untraditional. The ugly barrel nut that projected outward from the barrel detracted greatly from its appearance. The new revolver had "service" grips that did little to improve its looks and even less to control the effects of magnum recoil. I put the gun down and walked away. Not until many years later did a real interest in the Dan Wesson-designed revolvers re-awaken within me.

Actually, for a design that could be called a late bloomer in modern firearms circles, the Dan Wessons did quite well. Like most fledgling firms, they had their share of problems, but after a time many shooters made the gun their choice, especially for hunting and the demanding sport of handgun silhouette shooting (IHMSA). In fact it did so well in the latter sport that in the early '80s when the Wesson was at its competitive peak, during a period of three years Dan Wessons claimed 22 out of



Shown with the author's cherished Wesson Arms .44 Magnum (top), the "new generation" Dan Wesson Firearms .357 is the product of new manufacturing, marketing and ownership. The handsome stock of advanced design on the newer gun is a striking difference.

30 possible top-10 places and 42 out of 60 possible top-20 places. Were they on a roll or what?

These revolvers had their beginnings when Daniel B. Wesson—a great-grandson of D.B. Wesson, the co-founder of the Smith & Wesson company—decided to go it alone after the Wesson family sold Smith & Wesson to Bangor-Punta in the mid-1960s. Dan Wesson felt the need to produce something better, stronger and very innovative. The end result was the six-shot revolver produced by a firm that would be known as the Dan Wesson Firearms Company. Wesson was a perfectionist and wanted to produce really good guns

with an emphasis on quality, not quantity. He succeeded with guns that were extremely accurate, well made, handsomely polished, blued, tough as nails and offered something that no one else did: interchangeable barrels, sights and grips!

While things were looking great at the time of startup in 1968, a few years later just about everything started to turn worse. Just as the company was really up and running, Dan Wesson died suddenly in 1978. To make matters worse, Dan himself only owned 25 percent of the company while a few other investors controlled the rest. The estate was finally settled about a year later, and

WESSON

when the smoke cleared, the family as a whole had little or nothing left of the company. Dan's son, Seth Wesson, stayed on with the company until 1983, but then decided to pursue other interests. He really didn't keep track of the Dan Wesson company at that time simply because, as he said, "They (the new owners) were there to make money, not quality firearms."

Eventually, Seth wound up purchasing the company in partnership with his wife and a few key executives that were at the time involved with Wesson Arms. Things were very much upgraded: quality improved dramatically, and they even brought out a new gun complete with a rigid (as opposed to a removable) barrel system. After a brief resurgence, Dan Wesson Arms almost dropped out of sight. Despite a commitment to quality and an extensive lineup of product, sales were sluggish, and the revived Wesson Arms never became much of a market force.

In 1996 things again got better. Robert W. Serva, who has a machining business in upper New York state, purchased Wesson Arms together with all of the tooling, patents, trademarks and all of the remaining inventories. It was to be a fresh start; none of the old, tired machinery was brought up to the new location. The move took several weeks of hard labor, and when all was accounted for, the new Dan Wesson Firearms was ready to start production. I recently received a sample from their upgraded New Generation Small Frame Series called the Model 715. Chambered for the .38 Special/.357 Magnum, this new gun is going to be a real winner. In addition, manufacturing of the Large Frame, SuperMag, Compensated and Super Ram Silhouette series is already under way. With many different barrel lengths to suit any shooting occasion, Pistol and Hunter Packs and all kinds of accessories, this company is on the move to meet the needs of serious handgun shooters.

My sample came from Dan Wesson neatly placed in a brand new version



The attention to details and finishing on this stainless steel revolver was way above average. All the barrel shrouds in this Pistol Pack sported ventilated ribs.



The trigger on the Dan Wesson revolver is what the author would call "target" in width and is polished smooth to facilitate double-action shooting.



Serial numbers on the shrouds match those on the gun and make the Pistol Pack a complete package. The "First Edition" laser engraving marks the beginning of a new era for Dan Wesson's design.



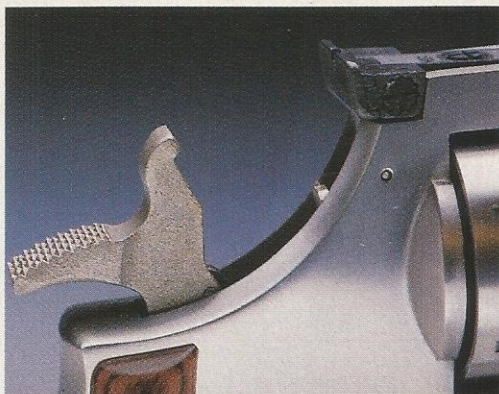
Stocks are attached to a tenon. There is no butt frame or profile, so stocks can be virtually any size or shape.

The new laminated finger-groove stock is not only very handsome but it also makes the revolver pleasant to shoot, even with hot magnum loads.



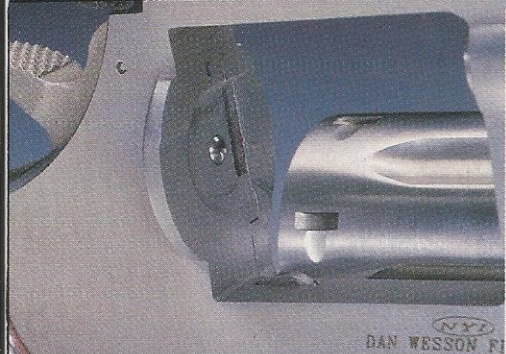


Fully adjustable target-type rear sights are standard. Various blades can be had with or without white outlines and wide or narrow notches. The hammer is sharply checked for all-weather use.



The Dan Wesson revolvers utilize a transfer-bar type of safety. This is a very positive safety system. Dan Wesson was one of the first contemporary designers to adopt it.

One of the best features of the Dan Wesson is the crane-mounted cylinder latch that engages a notch in the frame to help secure perfect cylinder to barrel alignment.



At the rear a ball bearing type of locking arrangement engages a recess in the center of the extractor.



Years of modifications have led to a much more refined barrel nut. Originally it stuck out of the gun, but for many years it has been recessed for a much cleaner look.

of the Pistol Pack. A really nifty case complete with a brass plate, blue outer covering and a snazzy inner partition gets you off to a fine start. As it comes from the factory, the Pack includes the Dan Wesson Model 715 in stainless (Model 15 is blued) complete with a series of four barrels in 2 1/2-, 4-, 6- and 8-inch lengths. Also packed inside were both laminated and rubber grips, a newly designed barrel nut wrench and additional accessories including a barrel-gap gauge, cleaning rod, company patch, instruction booklet and a few small Allen wrenches.

I've always been impressed by the design features and the quality of Dan Wesson guns, and this new generation is no different. Comparing my older .22 revolver with this more recent .357 Magnum, I find that both are so similar in size, construction and finish that if both were placed side by side, it would be hard to pick out the newer one. Both guns—although more than 20 years apart—could pass for yesterday's production run. Serva has done a remarkable job of preserving the Dan

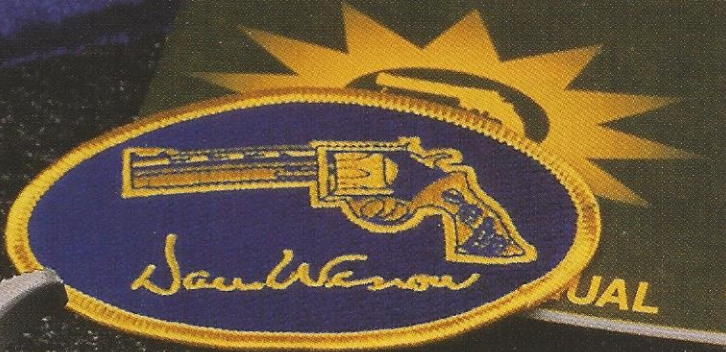
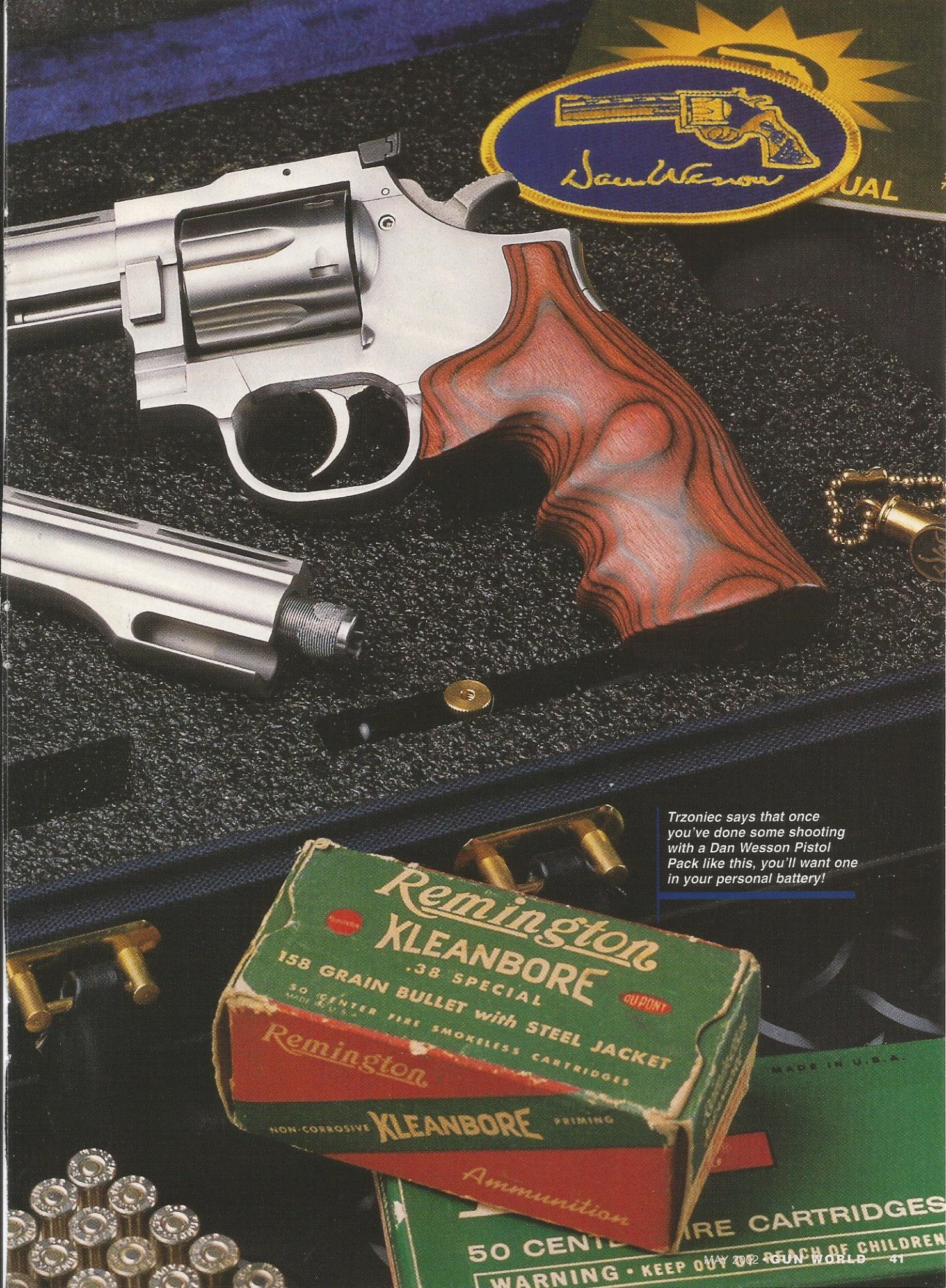
Wesson guns' quality and character.

With all of the competition out there, why would one choose a Dan Wesson revolver over another finely crafted revolver either now or 30-odd years ago? First, for a brand-new venture to be noticed, it pays to be different. Dan Wesson did this by some unique innovations, primarily by making use of interchangeable components like barrels, sights and stocks, as well as using an improved cylinder-latching system.

Dan Wesson revolvers are slightly larger and heftier than most competitive models. In short, Wesson guns are built right from the start to be magnum handguns, not something adapted from designs perfected when Teddy Roosevelt was in the White House. The .357 Magnums, for instance, are built on a frame that is somewhere between Smith's famous "K" and "L" frames yet closer to the larger "L" frame. There is just enough weight to make shooting full-power magnums tolerable, and the gun balances superbly with either a short or long barrel in place.

All outside surfaces of the gun are finely polished to a rich stainless luster. I have always been taken with the external finish of Dan Wesson revolvers. While I haven't seen any of the newer blued guns to date, previous Dan Wessons made by the Massachusetts facility had the best bluing I've ever seen on any guns. In fact, the bluing was so nice that I had to order a matched set of .44s from the Wesson factory in their "brite blue" finish. They are absolutely gorgeous and will remain in my collection to be passed on to my heirs.

The most distinctive feature of Dan Wesson revolvers is unquestionably the interchangeable barrels. Skeptics may argue that, if this feature is so desirable, why haven't other manufacturers incorporated it? I think this can be answered simply: The Dan Wesson revolver was built as an interchangeable gun from the get-go. To modify existing revolver designs would require brand new tooling and a whole line of barrels, shrouds and other items. Especially in today's rocky economy I don't think many manufacturers would care to undertake this, especially when semi-



Trzoniec says that once you've done some shooting with a Dan Wesson Pistol Pack like this, you'll want one in your personal battery!

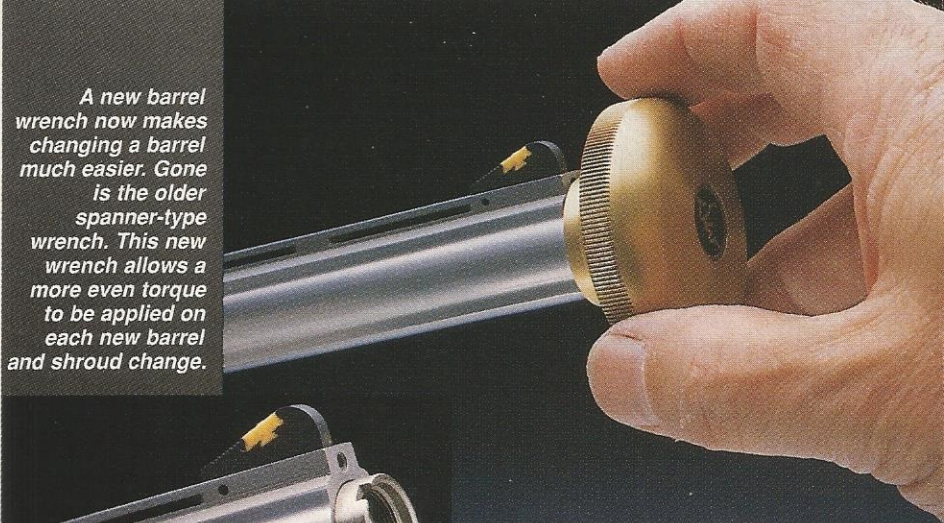
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rel into the frame until you almost touch the cylinder. Now insert the feeler gauge (supplied) against the front of the cylinder and turn the barrel inward until there is slight pressure felt on the gauge. Install the new shroud on the gun while keeping the feeler gauge in place. Install the barrel nut and hand-tighten it with the barrel wrench. When you are satisfied with the installation, remove the barrel nut wrench and feeler gauge. The gun is now ready to load and fire. After firing about a dozen rounds, recheck the barrel for the proper cylinder gap and tightness.

There are two reasons why Dan Wesson revolvers are held in such esteem for their accuracy: the barrel/shroud assembly and the cylinder lockup. The barrel and shroud are held under tension at both the muzzle end by the barrel nut and at the breech end with its union with the frame. While other revolvers are held to the gun only by attachment to the frame, the Wesson guns offer better accuracy by way of reduced vibration and less flexing of the barrel shot-to-shot with this design. Still another advantage is for those who like to use a scope. With plenty of metal topside to drill and tap for scope mounts, once a scope is mounted it stays with the host shroud, thus ensuring immediate zero when that barrel/shroud assembly is again installed on the frame.

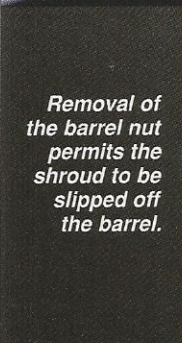
For improved cylinder lockup, Wesson engineered his guns with a crane-mounted front cylinder lockup which mates with a recess in the frame below the barrel breech, a positive setup that has been copied by other firms. At the rear of the cylinder is a spring-tensioned ball bearing that mates with the extractor for a solid lockup on this end. An added virtue of this setup is that shooters can unlock the weapon with the left hand only while preparing to load the gun with the right hand. Relative to the cylinder, I have a minor criticism. The locking notches are directly over each charge hole, and I would prefer it if they were offset for an extra margin




A new barrel wrench now makes changing a barrel much easier. Gone is the older spanner-type wrench. This new wrench allows a more even torque to be applied on each new barrel and shroud change.




The barrel nut is shown almost out so you can slip the shroud off of the barrel. The Allen screw just over the nut allows you to change the front sights.



Removal of the barrel nut permits the shroud to be slipped off the barrel.



The barrel can then be unscrewed from the frame and a new one screwed in.



Hand tighten the new assembly using the special wrench, and you're ready to go shooting!

of strength.

Let's look at some additional interchangeable possibilities of the Wesson revolver. The front sight blade can be changed by merely inserting a small Allen wrench into the rib at the muzzle end of the gun. Colored inserts are available that can optimize the sights for varying lighting situations, as are different



As a new barrel is being installed, insert the feeler gauge for the proper barrel-to-cylinder gap.

designs including the very traditional partridge-style blade in varying heights. Rear sight blades can be had with or without a white outline and with a narrow or wide notch. Grips can be changed, and Wesson offers a number of interesting handgun grips that differ greatly from old-line products. Rubber grips are of course part of the stable, but the new laminated grips complete with fitting grooves are really the best of

Continued on page 79

Dan Wesson Range Results

Ammunition	Velocity	Group
.38 Special:		
PMC Eldorado Starfire 125-gr. JHP +P	933 fps	2
Hornady 148-gr. Wadcutter	799 fps	1 1/8
Remington 158-gr. Lead Semi-Wadcutter	747 fps	1 1/2

.357 Magnum

Remington 125-gr. JHP	1,216 fps	2 1/2
Winchester 145-gr. Silvertip	1,339 fps	2 1/2
Remington 158-gr. Semi-Jacketed HP	1,085 fps	2

Assorted Barrel Lengths

Winchester 145-gr. Silvertip	2 1/2-inch Barrel	1,194 fps
	4-inch Barrel	1,250 fps
	6-inch Barrel	1,339 fps
	8-inch Barrel	1,364 fps

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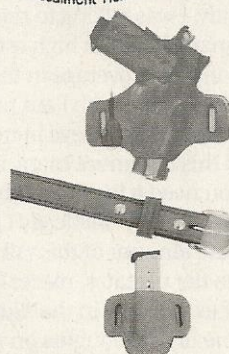
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Continued from page 43

the bunch. Whoever designed them knew what they were doing. They absorb the recoil and just feel comfortable in one's hand. Other styles like the traditional target grip in various grades of wood and wooden undercover grips fill out the line. In past years, I remember you could order an inletted blank, carve it and finish it yourself, then install it on your Wesson revolver in minutes.

The lockwork uses a transfer bar safety. The hammer spur is checked very sharply for a non-slip purchase when cocking the gun. The trigger is what I would call "target" width, smooth and broke at 4 1/2 pounds with just a hint of take-up. The double-action pull was fairly heavy—around 12 pounds.

At the range, the gun was a real pleasure to shoot and handle thanks to those hand-filling wood grips and the overall design of the gun. With all of the ammunition fired that day, the gun was lightly rested on the bench to simulate field conditions, as one would expect shooting over a log or possibly in the prone position. Shooting .38 Specials brought back remembrances of the days when this cartridge was the very first centerfire I ever shot and handloaded for in a revolver. Today's factory ammunition is no different, and all of the groups went 2 inches or under with velocities within the 700 to 800 fps

bracket with the exception of the PMC Eldorado brand. These were +Ps, and the higher velocity opened up the groups to a still pleasing 2 inches at 20 yards. The star of the day was Hornady's 148-grain wadcutter sample with groups running just over an inch.

Magnum ammunition also shot well from this gun, and the groups were similar to those fired with .38 Specials. Velocity and accuracy results are set forth in the accompanying chart. Just for the record, I took the Winchester 145-grain Silvertip and fired a few rounds in each barrel length from 2 1/2 to 8 inches to see the velocity difference. True to form, for every inch of barrel lost (or gained), you can expect an increase (or decrease) of about 25 fps. From the 2 1/2-inch tube we noted 1,194 fps, the 4-inch generated 1,250 fps, the 6-inch averaged 1,339 and finally, the 8-inch, which is most popular with hunters, averaged around 1,364 fps.

Once you've had a chance to shoot one of these revolvers, it's very difficult not to have at least one of the Wesson products in your handgun battery. They are finely crafted, very accurate, fun to shoot and made in the United States. What more could you ask for? There is one thing—how about a 5-inch barrel and shroud?

For more information contact Dan Wesson Firearms, Dept. GW, 119 Kemper Lane, Norwich, New York 13815; (607) 336-1174; www.danwessonfirearms.com. ©



A new pistol rest is now available from Dan Wesson Firearms. Handy and range-worthy, it is ideal for accuracy testing.

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