

## A SECOND OPINION: SMITH'S SW1911 IS VERY NEAR THE MARK

Smith & Wesson finally got a .45 automatic right. The new SW1911 is the first Smith-made .45 auto I would personally own, having cut my teeth over a quarter century ago on Colt's versions. Along the way to the SW1911, Smith & Wesson generated a host of also-rans, clumsy to the hands of many shooters, though like most guns made by this ancient but thoroughly modern company, they were all well made. But there was always something wrong with them, ergonomics usually, that kept these earlier versions of .45 autos out of the hands of serious competitors, who preferred the 1911 design. Some months back, a friend of mine told me he had seen 1911 parts being made by S&W that had another maker's name on them. S&W, with its new, intelligent, forward-thinking, and shooter-oriented management, finally saw the light and began producing its own version of the old war-horse. The SW1911 is better than most Colt clones and has some innovations.

Smith did almost everything on the SW1911 just like most combat-trained shooters require, from the grand Novak sights to the beveled mag well, and from the comfortable beavertail to the snug fit of the barrel in its bushing. The external extractor, which mimics that used by John Browning on his Hi-Power, requires a new hole on top of the slide that some won't like. But the S&W passed the first test of any .45 auto with flying colors. Raking one's hand down the length of the slide revealed no sharp edges, so a stovepipe jam can be cleared without the need to bleed. However, the corner of the external extractor was razor-sharp, and it's possible the fingers can catch it. It needs rounding.

We found no other hand- or holster-gouging edges, and that's rare on most new, factory-made 1911 types. Only Wilson's and Valtro's guns have had it exactly right of those I've seen.

This sample didn't have gold-filled trim, but it was otherwise similar to the second test gun described on these pages. The trigger was a long Videki, made of aluminum. The thumb safety was long, easy to hit, positive, and thankfully one-sided only. Some won't like the rubber grips, but any 1911 grips can be installed to suit. Press checking must be done using the forward slide serrations because of the slide-spring rod design. The magazine release protruded, but not too far, and Wilson Combat's eight-round mags fell free and went back in positively. The flat, coarsely checkered mainspring housing was not magnetic. It probably was aluminum. All the rest of the gun was steel, and all the parts, inside and out, were stout and

very well made, and the fitting was outstanding throughout. In case you didn't know, S&W knows how to make gun parts and put 'em together.

Now the bad stuff. The trigger pull of this sample was way too heavy, measuring almost 6.5 pounds. It was crisp, but fairly useless for serious shooting. The grip safety required excess force to depress. The grip safety, through levers, presses upward on a firing-pin lock within the slide. This system is similar to that used by Colt's on its current 1911 series. Using a Lyman digital gauge, I measured the force needed to fully depress the grip safety on two normal 1911s, and found it to be well under two pounds. I measured at right angles to the back strap, with the gauge catching the lowest point on the grip safety. The SW1911 measured a resounding 5.3 pounds. This amount of crush is noticeable to the trained hand, even though that hand may be squeezing the grip mercilessly.

Partly because of the excess grip-spring pressure needed, I was not able to consistently depress the grip safety and had numerous failures to fire, under time constraints. My hands require changing the shape of the grip safety or adding a pad. I'd have a good gunsmith reduce the force needed to depress the grip safety, and also have him reduce the trigger pull to 4 pounds before I'd carry the Smith.

The front-strap serrations were useless for me. They did almost nothing to help hold onto the gun. I'd prefer fine checkering, which could be easily added, but then, up goes the cost of the gun. Finally, there was no barrel-bushing wrench provided. Instead, S&W gave the buyer a huge padlock along with the two Wilson magazines. That simple fifty-cent wrench is NEEDED to field-strip a 1911 of this design. Without it, shooters will use anything handy to get the gun apart, with resultant gouged eyes, broken windows, damaged gun parts, and curse-filled air.

In short, I did not think the SW1911 was fully combat-ready as it comes from the factory, though it was darned close. The SW1911 gave good accuracy with three types of ammo tried. It shot close to where it looked, and there were no failures of any sort with the gun's operation. It was tight, positive, and gave a feeling of confidence, though the poor trigger tempered that somewhat, with its clear indication the gun needs attention. I congratulate S&W for this handgun. I hope it will commonly have a trigger pull in the range of 4 to 4.5 pounds, and that the package will include a bushing wrench.

—Ray Ordorica