

# Colt 1911A1 .38 Super

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**.38 Super magazine is purpose designed for feeding reliably.**

**THE** .38 Super cartridge and the 1911 handgun are among the most effective combinations available for all-around service use and personal defense, yet it is underutilized to say the least.

The pistol saw extensive use in the hands of the FBI and figured into the demise of dangerous Depression-era fugitives such as Baby Face Nelson. The caliber also saw service with the other side of the law. If you look closely at images of John Dillinger's highly modified 1911 with foregrip, converted to fully automatic fire, the extended magazine is obviously a .38 Super.

But this review isn't about history. It's about the performance of a worthwhile cartridge that has seen action and earned an excellent reputation. The .38 Automatic Colt Pistol (ACP) cartridge was introduced in 1900 along with the Colt 1900 pistol, predating both the 9mm Luger and the .45 ACP.

## **ORIGINAL .38 ACP LOADING**

As originally loaded, the .38 ACP is more or less as powerful as the 9mm Luger, 9mm Steyr, 9mm Largo, and the like. The difference we are interested in is that the .38 ACP features a .900-inch long cartridge case. When the U.S. Army wanted a .45 ACP pistol, John Moses Browning designed the 1911 around a .900-inch long cartridge case and modified his original handgun design. This paved the way for the later introduction of a .38 ACP 1911.

The original 130-grain .38 ACP loading produced about 1,050 feet-per-second (fps). In 1929 Colt introduced the 1911 in .38 ACP and the new loading was advertised at 1,300 fps, although a realistic velocity was 1,260 fps. At the same time, the original .38 ACP Colt was finally discontinued.

The reasons for the introduction of the .38 Super are not always fully understood. Colt marketed the .38 Super successfully as a peace officer's handgun. The jacketed 130-grain bullet had more penetration than common handgun calibers and proved effective against the new class of mechanized criminal. The .45 ACP and .38 Special loads were not as effective against vehicles and cover as the .38 Super.

Colt also wished to keep a medium-bore pistol in production for those who favored the lighter recoiling .38 over the .45. Finally the .45 ACP (and 9mm) could not be sold in most South American nations because it was prohibited as a military cartridge. That made three good reasons Colt had for introducing the .38-caliber 1911.

## **BIRTH OF THE .38 SUPER**

The engineering was not difficult, since the .45 ACP pistol already used a .900-inch long cartridge. The slide was redesigned to a smaller breechface and the barrel properly chambered. The magazine features the same exterior dimensions as the .45 ACP, though a slot runs the length of the magazine to pinch the magazine to the appropriate dimensions.

The .38 Super was a commercial success for several years. There are a number of reasons for its loss of popularity, but it seems that competition from the .357 Magnum cartridge was the main reason the .38 Super fell out of favor.

We were a nation of revolver shooters, and the .357 Magnum gave lawmen a cartridge of greater power. The Smith & Wesson revolver was more accurate than the Colt 1911. While the 1911 had greater firepower and a better sustained rate of fire, the big Smith & Wesson revolver proved accurate well past 100 yards.