

BAD RAP

On the subject of accuracy, we need to address a consideration that dogged the Super for much of its service life. The pistol gained a reputation for inaccuracy that is probably not deserved. Standards for the GI 1911 .45 were generous—on the order of a five-inch group at 25 yards. (Most .45s were more accurate, with military testing prior to World War I showing pistols capable of 2.4-inch groups.)

The Super was less accurate by reliable reports. The problem seemed to be in inconsistent headspace. Browning was finding his way with the early ACP cartridges. Both the .32 ACP and .38 ACP feature a slight semi-rim for headspace. This is less reliable than the later headspace on the case mouth design of the .45 ACP.

Modern 1911 handguns beginning about 1981 headspace properly on the case mouth. Before those days, the Bar-Sto Precision barrel turned many .38 Super pistols into tack drivers. Regardless, for combat use the Super wasn't all that inaccurate.

With a somewhat spotted history behind it, the Super isn't always recognized for its performance today. One aspect of the performance of the 1911/.38 Super combination cannot be argued and that is reliability.

I am going to avoid comparing the .38 Super to the .357 SIG or the 9mm. These cartridges are useful in 9mm size handguns. The .38 ACP must be chambered in a .45 size handgun due to the case length. This means the 1911 (or Witness or SIG P220 size).



1911 .38 Super, right, compared to .45 ACP magazine, left.

.38 SUPER STRENGTHS

The good attributes of the 1911 bear mention. The pistol features a straight-to-the-rear trigger compression, low bore axis, grip that fits most hands well, and excellent speed into action. There is no pistol faster to an accurate first shot than a 1911 handgun. When chambered in .38 Super, the pistol is even faster to accurate repeat shots. This has been borne out in competition.

Given the efficiency of the .45 ACP cartridge for personal defense, there must be a compelling reason to adopt the .38 Super. After all, the big-bore .45 ACP is proven and effective, right? The Super has advantages in penetration

and control. For those who find .45 ACP recoil daunting, the .38 Super is a much easier cartridge to master. While some may not feel the .45 ACP has excess recoil, an individual firing thousands of rounds yearly in practice may disagree.

The .38 Super has two more rounds of magazine capacity. The cartridge has the same penetration and high velocity advantages of the .357 SIG in a platform that allows good control. Long-range practical shooting is possible with the 1911/.38 Super format. The .38 Super is not a "little" better than the 9mm. It is a *much* more powerful cartridge, particularly with heavier bullets.

SUPER AMMO

The .38 Super cartridge seems to invite misunderstanding and even the name invites confusion. Many cartridge boxes are now marked .38 ACP +P or .38 Auto +P. The .38 ACP in its various loads generates pressure of 26,500 to 36,500 psi. That is a wide spread, but most Colt 1911 pistols will function with all these loads.

The problem came 40 years ago when SAAMI began standardizing the +P designation. Practically every modern .38 Super load was a +P. However, there are a number of modest loads that are great practice loads and quite accurate. This includes the Fiocchi 129-grain loading at 1,150 fps. The Winchester USA 130-grain FMJ loading breaks at about 1,150 fps. These would be safe to fire in a good tight 1900 Colt.

By the same token, it isn't a challenge to load a 115-grain JHP to 1,300 fps in the .38 Super. That is simply 9mm +P+ territory. Remember, the .38 Super



Author finds 1911A1 accurate and reliable.

» PENETRATION AND EXPANSION, COLT 1911A1 .38 SUPER

LOAD	VELOCITY (fps)	PENETRATION (inches)	EXPANSION (caliber)
Buffalo Bore 115-gr. Barnes	1,411	20.0	.60
Buffalo Bore 115-gr. JHP	1,429	10.5	Fragmented
Buffalo Bore 124-gr. JHP	1,365	36+	Not recovered
Buffalo Bore 124-gr. Gold Dot	1,340	18.0	.80
CorBon 115-gr. JHP	1,457	10.5	Fragmented
CorBon 125-gr. JHP	1,323	14.0	.80
CorBon 125-gr. DPX	1,288	19.0	.58
Wilson Combat 124-gr. XTP	1,320	16.0	.68
Winchester 125-gr. Silvertip	1,201	11.0	.70