

Hey Y'all,

I've been getting acquainted with the 356 TSW handgun cartridge which I think of as the Zombie of the practical shooting world. It seems to be quite "undead." I've tried it in several handguns and one carbine. As a result I've developed a keen interest in guns made for the 9x19mm cartridge which has not favorably impressed me for most of my shooting life. The most important thing about the 356TSW is that it offers performance well above the 9x19mm cartridge. One word describes the situation, "Wow!"

The TSW part of the cartridge's name stands for Team Smith&Wesson. Smith&Wesson had their engineers develop the cartridge specifically to win in the popular IPSC competitions. Almost by accident they created a seriously high performance practical shooting platform for real-world shooting. The hows & whys that kept the 356TSW from taking over the practical shooting market are a mixed bag of snobbery from the people that run IPSC, and some impressive short-sightedness on the part of the Smith & Wesson executives.

Development of the 356TSW created a superior practical shooting package by any reckoning. It effectively combined the high capacity of guns chambered for the 9x19mm cartridge while comfortably getting into the IPSC Major Power category. That last fact allowed it to compete along side the venerable 45ACP. The 45ACP is the darling of the IPSC game and forcing it to compete with the 356TSW simply couldn't be tolerated. They cried Blasphemy! In a tantrum of petulant vanity the rules were carefully rewritten so the 356TSW could never qualify for Major Power. After that S&W lost interest and the public lost a top shelf practical shooting platform. The 356TSW might have become the proverbial "Top Gun" if it had lived. It certainly had the potential to become the new king of the practical shooting hill.

Perhaps S&W didn't want the competition for their other brainchild, the 40-S&W. There can be no doubt that the 356TSW would've been stiff competition for the then new 40-S&W which was coming along nicely about that time. There is good cause to think it might have caused the larger cartridge to fizzle and die if the 356TSW had been allowed to continue in the open market. Ammunition makers were already turning out "man-stopper" loads with the top bullets of the day. If a few real life high profile gun battles had occurred with the new cartridge it's reasonable to suppose it might still be on the shelves wherever ammo is sold.

Shooting the 356TSW just needs a small change to the chamber and sometimes a slightly stronger recoil spring. Very small changes indeed. The same magazines are used because both the 9x19 and the 356TSW have the same Cartridge-Over-All-Length (COAL.) Thus the 356TSW gets the practical advantage of Major Power *and* the high

capacity of the 9mm ctg. The 9x19mm is a fairly respectable cartridge in its own right but high capacity is what kept it alive its whole life. The thing that seemed to make the 9x19mm better was more power which always came with less fire power. That is, until the 356-TSW came on the scene.

For decades I've used 357 Magnums for real life applications. I think those experiences set me up to have a keen appreciation for the idea of magazine fed guns that offered performance close to that of a 357 Magnum. While the 356TSW can't quite match the 357 Magnum it's not far behind and it brings high capacity with it. That's an important blend of attributes for a combat handgun to offer! The recoil feels about the same as the 40-S&W in my hands. It's more than a 9mm but less than the 357 Magnum. Too bad the only way to get that package is to get an after market barrel for the gun or ream the chamber of the factory 9x19mm barrel. A somewhat stronger recoil spring is also appropriate for some models. Many folks aren't ready to "ruin" their 9x19mm barrel by getting it reamed to 356TSW. After market barrels and high performance ammunition for 356TSW were both readily available in the mid 90s. Not so today.

In the spirit of "*I gots to know*" I decided to see if the 9x19mm would function in barrels with 356TSW chambers. To date most 356TSW firearms that I've been able to try will shoot the 9x19mm cartridge from the same chamber. Some function well. Others don't. Still others shoot *okay* but with occasional hic-ups. That occasional hic-up performance was typical of *all* semi-autos for about 100 years. That includes the 14-shot Browning Hi-Power pistol which was the world standard for 9x19mm pistols for many decades. Then Glock dragged the entire gun industry into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by proving to the world that semi-auto pistols could be *reliable*. It seems the individual gun decides for itself whether or not it'll shoot the 356TSW without tweaking. I have a Ruger P95DC with an aftermarket 356TSW barrel that also shoots the 9x19 cartridge efficiently. The only time that gun misbehaves is when the two cartridges are mixed in the same magazine. Even then it's not much worse than the old Browning Hi-Power ever was. Another Ruger P95DC I tried was less perfect when tested the same way. Until the industry embraces the 356TSW again I hesitate to tweak a gun to shoot it for fear of losing whatever reliability the gun has to offer with its factory specs. The after market barrel chambered for 356TSW is the better answer but it's still a bit of a gamble. Interestingly, when functional performance isn't perfect it's still about as good as any semi-auto ever was before Glock showed everyone how it's done.

When it comes to accuracy 9mm caliber cartridges seem to like high velocity. The faster the bullet goes the tighter the group. That's how it seemed to me for about 4 decades regardless of the gun or 9mm cartridge being used. But what do I know?

I can say this, after being able to change the barrel on 3 different makes & models of pistols and compare the 9x19mm against the 356TSW in the same guns it's the latter that makes notably tighter groups without exception. More velocity makes some important differences (like Major Power) for any bullet of the 9mm family.

The 356TSW is simply a better cartridge than the old 9x19mm. That's all there is to it. The only drawback that exists with the 356TSW has to do with ones personal ability to deal with recoil. For some folks the 9x19mm is all the power they can handle. Fortunately for them the old 9x19mm has a respectable history of combat performance. It ranks very closely *behind* the venerable 45ACP which is very closely *behind* the 357 Magnum which is still the king of the hill for one-shot man stopping. But only for six shots. Sadly, when S&W threw in the towel on their brainchild the commercial world did too. For now the 356TSW is a virtual Zombie in the practical shooting world.

So, where can you get ammo? Ah, there's the rub. Ammo Mfrs were gearing up and some were already selling 356TSW ammo when it met its demise. Small custom ammo companies will make it for you at considerable expense. For me reloading is the answer. For most folks that's asking a lot so the 356TSW remains largely unknown. That's a sad end for a true "best of everything" as it pertains to real save-your-life practical shooting. The consumer was the only loser in the sad story of the 356TSW.

But wait, there's more. I've been testing a Ruger carbine that had it's 9x19 chamber reamed for the 356TSW cartridge. That package offers good accuracy and realistic utility for about 100yds on critters from groundhogs to deer. In some 50 years of hunting I've shot plenty of game at bragging distances but I'd still guess that as much as 80% of all my shots on live game are made at less than 70 steps. This carbine has a 2x7 scope mounted on it and has shown that it'll deliver practical fire for 200yds or more. Specifics? Casual shooting at 100yds usually produces groups that I can cover with my hand, often just the palm of my hand. It easily gives "minute of oil bottle" groups. At 200yds I can hit gallon milk jugs with most shots fired. (Minute of milk-jug?) I accept that my own ability may be part of any bad group.

Here in the east coyotes are commonly hunted & shot with shotguns at distances that rarely exceed 50 yards. This carbine is easily lethal on coyotes for 200 yards though at that distance generic hits are all I can be sure of even with the 2x7 scope. I doubt if greater magnification will help and I like it the way it is. Making a telling hit on a coyote at *any* distance is adequate for my interests. That gun is a little heavy as carbines go but with the 356TSW cartridge it's practical. After all considerations, these 356TSW gun & cartridge combinations have a permanent place in my home arsenal.