



NEW S&W 457S 45ACP

By Denis Prishbrey

A new-old friend — light, corrosion resistant, powerful and packable!

Way back in the once-upon-a-time era, being one who preferred a substantial caliber in a substantial gun, when the department I was working for did another one of its "Authorized List" changes, I started looking around for a non-polymer pistol that fired John Browning's second greatest invention—the .45ACP cartridge. After several years of being restricted to a 9mm, the clouds had parted to let sunshine through, and the only downside was that John M's most outstanding gift to the defensive handgun world, the 1911 pistol, was not on the approved list. We'd been allowed to carry .45s previously, till the day the Lt. in charge of the firearms program convinced our chief that the 9mm round was absolutely the best thing going for law enforcement since the doughnut was invented, and several of us missed the .45s we had to give up. (This is not a dump on the 9mm, it can certainly get the job done.) Back in '88, a lot of people were still buying into the old DOJ Computer Man Model that rated the 9mm far ahead of the .45ACP, .357 Magnum, and so on, and the chief was one of them. But, in '95, when enlightenment slowly crept in and the one-gun-fits-all dogma was forced out, after a quick look at the makes, models and calibers we had to choose from, I beat



Double recoil spring keeps frame battering to a minimum, helps control muzzle rise.





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(Main photo) As a plainclothes or off-duty sidearm, S&W's DA/SA Model 457S carries 8 rounds of potent .45ACP in an all-weather stainless package that rides light on the belt. (Left) Backside of the Bulman FDS shows bell attachments and high-rise "slide guard."

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NEW S&W 457S .45ACP

a quick path to the nearest cop shop to order what I thought was something I could live with. Or, had a better chance of living with.

The pistol was a Smith & Wesson Model 4516-2, all stainless steel, and chambered for the heavy, slow and unglamorous .45ACP. It wasn't the single-action I preferred, but it was solidly constructed, very corrosion resistant, carried 8 rounds of proven 230-grain Federal Hydra-Shoks, and was compact enough with its 3.75-inch barrel and shortened gripframe to work double duty both in and out of uniform. It also fit my hand quite well, and just felt like a confidence booster all the way round.

Night sights and Hogue pebble-grained

black rubber grips were installed, and the stiff ambidextrous thumb safety/de-cocker rotation was smoothed out. The pistol went just about everywhere with me for three years, until circumstances dictated another change for the last year before I retired. That 4516, which I still have, was dead nuts reliable with everything I ever put through it, and that even includes Speer's shotshell snake loads that choke many other pistols. Accuracy was all I ever asked of it, and today it sits in the vault just as ready to go as it ever was. I tend not to let trusted duty friends get away.

The 4516s were phased out of Smith & Wesson's lineup several years ago;



(Above) Josh Bulman's fine FDS holster and QMF combo mag/light pouch coupled with Spyderco's rugged Ocelot folder add up to great support gear. (Left) Spurless hammer shown in cocked firing position with safety off (left). Hammer rests inside the slide when ready for use in double-action mode (right).



shooters apparently decided it was too heavy for its size and a bit more expensive than many were willing to pay for a semi-compact pistol, and the company replaced it with an aluminum-framed model

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of a very similar size and configuration in blued form that's sold well. The Model 457 is markedly lighter and more compact for daily carry as a concealed defensive pistol than the company's full-sized 9-shot autos, and provides a more substantial grip with a better magazine capacity than the smaller 7-shot CS45 Chiefs Specials. The blued 457, in fact, has done well enough for S&W to offer the same gun in a stainless version as the Model 457S.

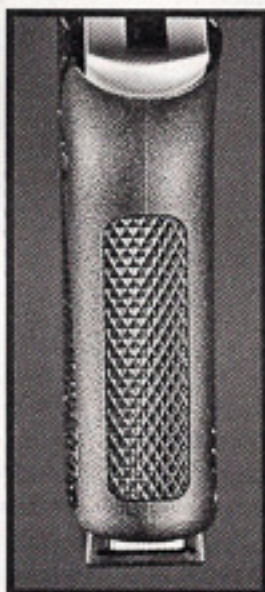
GUN DETAILS

Otherwise identical to the blued 457, the stainless 457S uses the same 7-shot magazines, features the same Novak-style fixed sights with the same 3.75-inch barrel and fixed bushing in the slide, the same DA/SA trigger, abbreviated hammer, slide mounted safety/de-cocker and thin black nylon checkered grips. The only differences between it and the blued pistols are the matte finished stainless slide and a slightly lighter grey anodized aluminum frame.

Part of the American Pride Series, S&W has built the 457S to a certain price point and feature level to make it more affordable, and more appealing weight-wise, to the concealed carry market. In comparing the 2005 sample 457S to my 1995 4516, the changes are quite obvious between what was one of S&W's top of the line models then, and what the company feels will meet its market target now on a pistol of this class.

The 457S uses a blockier slide; the 4516 featured rounded contours along the top of the slide and at its rear; the newer pistol's slide uses flat milled surfaces that reduce machining time. The ambidextrous thumb safety of the 4516 is now a single

Black plastic grips are checkered on all three sides for positive control, very thin for flat carry on a CCW permit.



lever on the left side of the slide. The three-dot sights are black plastic, and the checkering on the front outside arch of the triggerguard is gone, so is the vertically grooved area on the frontstrap. Inside, the 457S shows several parts now made by Metal Injection Molding (MIM), such as the trigger, hammer, drawbar and sear. These are all either cosmetic or construction differences; the basic package and functions remain the same, while keeping production costs down and the price to the end user at what Smith & Wesson hopes will be competitive with other makers' pistols of similar performance and size.

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

I always liked the heft of the 4516. It could be relatively heavy at times, but for me a goodly chunk of steel in the hand just says, "Hey, bud, I'm here for serious business." Illogical, yes, especially given the track record of alloy and polymer frames today. One non-subjective, non-emotional and non-traditionally biased issue with lighter pistols in heavier calibers does still legitimately raise a question, though, and that's how it handles recoil.

A short-barreled pistol doesn't necessarily have to give up accuracy, and my 4516 didn't. But, an alloy-framed pistol does bounce around in the hand a bit more than a heavier all-steel version does, and that can be a factor in follow-up shots. Great on the hip all day long; when it comes to thunder and smoke, recoil can be a problem for many.

On a thoroughly overcast day in January, I took my sample 457S to the pit for testing with five commercial ammo brands, in two different bullet weights and two different bullet nose profiles, to see how the lightweight pistol performs.

Normally, I tend to shoot

ROTON USA

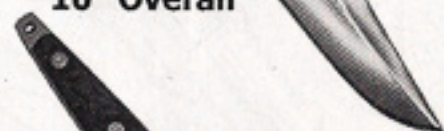
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SPECIFICATIONS

SMITH & WESSON 457S

Caliber: .45ACP • Barrel: 3.75 inches • OA Length: 7.25 inches • Weight: 28 ounces (empty)

Grips: Black checkered plastic • Sights: Three-dot, black plastic, Novak style, fixed

Action: Semi-auto, DA/SA • Safety: Thumb safety/de-cocker, internal passive firing pin block

Finish: Matte stainless slide, matte alloy frame • Capacity: 7 + 1 • MSRP: \$676

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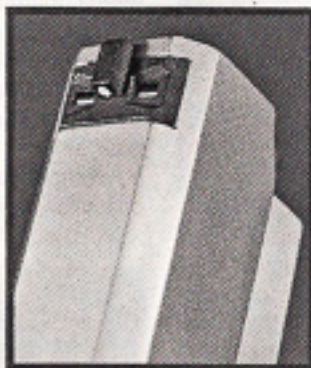
NEW S&W 457S .45ACP

'em as they come out of the box. However, in dealing with a stainless slide and an aluminum frame, I broke the pistol down first to check for adequate lube. It was a good thing I did—frame and slide rails were both pretty much bone dry. After a quick swab in appropriate spots with Militec-1, I reassembled the gun and packed everything off to the range. The temperature through the shoot was a fairly constant 39 degrees, and I find if an auto's going to bind up, it'll usually do it in cold and humid weather, as burned powder residue mixes with lube to create a sludge. No lube at all obviously has its own inherent potential for malfunctions, and I wanted to give the pistol a fair chance. Although the session was fairly brief, 80 rounds told me what I needed to know.

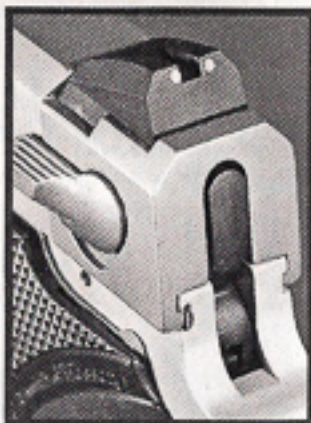
At 25 yards from a sandbag rest, the 457S sample could hold under 3 inches with ammo it liked and when my eyes could line up the sights in the murky lighting. Like my old 4516, function was 100%, and that included both 185 and 230-grain bullets, in round nosed FMJ and JHP profiles as well as the truncated profile of the Winchester BEBs. Point-of-impact varied between the heavier and lighter bullets, but that was expected, and not far enough off the point-of-aim to be a problem at traditional save-your-butt distances. Windage was just a fraction off to the right, and with both front and rear sights riding in dovetails, it would have taken about 30 seconds

to correct for that if I'd wanted to bother digging out my plastic mallet.

The grey gun did step livelier under recoil than its older steel ancestor, but the ergonomics are really quite good on these pistols; the double recoil spring arrangement around a steel guide rod (which I like) helps restrain muzzle rise, and with the checkering on both sides and back of the grip panels, it wasn't at all hard to control. Since I never used the checkering on the front of the triggerguard anyway, not having it on the alloy frame made no difference at all, and I also didn't notice the smooth front-strap as a problem, either. Changing the slide profiles made the 457S look a little less refined, but obviously made no difference in how the thing shoots.



Front and rear three-dot sights are plastic, and dovetailed for upgrades or windage adjustments.



LEATHER

I first came across Josh Bulman about six years ago. He was building good leather then, and the current FDS (Forward Drop Scabbard) he sent to fit the 457S is absolutely top grade. I spent a couple minutes looking for flaws on it and gave up. Perfectly molded to fit the contours of the pistol, it's also perfectly dyed and stitched, and the pistol literally snaps into place on holstering. The FDS is an open-topped design, and you won't need to worry about retention with this one. The holster attaches with a tunnel loop on its body and a slotted tab at the rear, and features an extended section of leather that rides between the thumbsafety/

PERFORMANCE

SMITH & WESSON 457S .45ACP

Load	Accuracy
Winchester 185 SilverTip JHP	2.63
Winchester 230 WinClean BEB	2.31
Remington UMC 230 MC	4.25
Remington 230 Golden Saber JHP	4.00
Homady 185 XTP JHP	2.44

Bullet weight measured in grains and accuracy in inches for best 5-shot group from 25 yards. Elevation: 4500 feet. Temperature: 39 degrees.



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decocker and the wearer's body to prevent that lever from chewing up cloth or skin. Using this holster with a blued 457 would also completely shield the blued slide from contact with sweat, which could be important to those who live in places where pink flamingoes flourish. It also uses a reinforced leather band around the top of the holster to keep it from collapsing, and people may place more emphasis on getting the pistol out than back in, but trust me, being able to re-holster quickly one-handed when you need that hand for other uses does make a difference, and many lesser holsters fail in this area. There were two occasions in my career when I needed my gunhand suddenly to wrestle with; in the first case while trying to get a shotgun away from a guy before he finished loading it, and in the second to take down a "Suicide By Cop" wielding a machete. Both incidents left indelible memories of trying to re-holster under stress, and Josh's FDS is a very well thought out design.



Scalloped behind triggerguard provides full three-fingered hold.

It's also made of premium Grade A cowhide for durability, and so is the matching QMF magazine/light pouch he sent along with it. The magazine/light pouch is designed to ride on the off side, with the spare magazine to the front and slanted slightly forward to provide a good accessible grip. Bullet tips are carried forward. Both items are available in either black

or mahogany, and the price for the holster is a very reasonable \$85. The QMF (Quick Magazine and Flashlight pouch) is priced at \$55. Excellent gear.

KNIFE NEWS

Spyderco continues to improve their product line in both designs and materials, and one that didn't have much appeal to me in the catalog turned out quite the opposite in person. The new Tim Wegner collaboration Ocelot is primarily marketed as a hunting blade, and it'd be pretty efficient as an outdoors knife in general for those who might tote the 457S along on a hike, but the ergonomics and blade construction are so handy that it should also make a good companion to the pistol just about anywhere. With a 3.25-inch hollow ground blade of superior VG-10 steel designed for one-handed opening, rugged textured G-10 handle material, full steel liners, steel clip adaptable for tip-up or tip-down carry, and light weight of 4.1 ounces, it also

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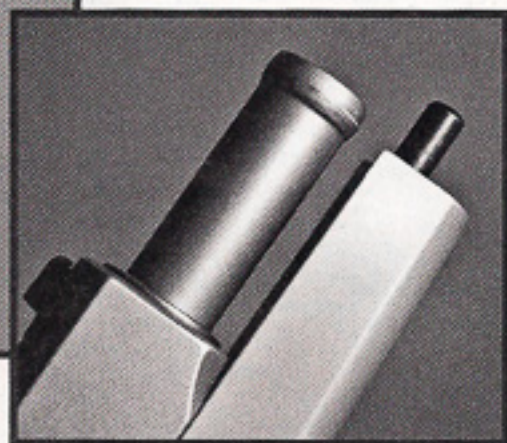
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(Left) Magazine baseplates are easily removable for cleaning, thick enough to make an effective slam pad for positive seating. (Below) The short pistol uses a belled barrel, a fixed barrel bushing, and a steel recoil spring guide rod for excellent reliability.



features serrations in three different spots on the blade spine for non-slip use in wet or slippery hands. One of the better Spyderco designs, in my opinion, and not cheap, it runs about \$125 at various outlets, but it is well worth the price.

FINAL NOTES

In the hand, 2.25 pounds of the all-steel pistol doesn't seem like much, I've got a nice chunky pottery coffee cup that weighs about that when it's full in the morning. On the hip all day, though, and especially when you toss in 8 rounds of short and squat .45ACP, it does add up. If you like traveling light, and most people with brand new CCW permits gravitate in that direction sooner or later, 1.75 pounds (unloaded) with the alloy-framed pistol has some distinct appeal.

As mentioned, ergonomics are good. In a pistol with a straight backstrap like this, I find a shorter one that puts the entire grip inside the palm of my hand, instead of extending below it, seems to feel more natural for some reason. The thin factory grip section provides good control while maintaining a narrow width on the 457S for flat

concealment, and the spurless hammer adds to its low profile. Smith & Wesson has put a scallop at the bottom rear of the triggerguard that allows the pistol to ride slightly lower in the hand, another good feature. The DA trigger pull was heavy, but smoother than the way my old 4516 originally came, and the SA pull was overly stiff at 7.25 pounds. Both are correctable. The safety was also stiff, and the slide lock lever took quite a bit of thumb to release. Both should wear in with use. Recognizing that the 457S is built to a price level, the differences between it and the earlier 4516s that preceded it are understandable and don't affect overall function. My only real complaint about the sample was that, in common with all current S&W traditional DA pistols, it uses a nylon disconnect. The company obviously feels comfortable with that, but I have my reservations about the durability of a small nylon part that's abraded twice per shot by a large reciprocating steel slide. Non-stressed part it may be, but it's still a friction contact part. Time will tell.

Otherwise, the 457S hefts well, it's controllable under recoil for both single and double-action fire, corrosion resistant, relatively lightweight, reliable, and accurate enough for its intended purpose. The non-slag dot sights are helpful in a hurry, the stainless magazines' baseplates are removable for easy cleaning, and the .45ACP chambering is a confidence builder for those who prefer the bigbores in a defensive pistol. Fit and finish was very well done.

S&W lists the pistol at \$676, your dealer will most likely shave about a hundred off the top. If the 457S might meet your needs, give it a shot. Or two.

For more information:

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