

THE REVOLVER ⁶¹

There are exceptions, of course, and the whole reason behind carrying a gun for self-defense is that you're worried about the stakes more than the odds. Nobody wants to be the statistical anomaly, and the point of arming yourself is that you're preparing yourself for the unlikely extreme. However, as an advocate of the revolver, I have spent a lot of time trying to find an example of a case where the choice of carrying a five- or six-shot revolver proved fatal for a private citizen, and I haven't been able to unearth a single documented and verified incident where a non-cop has been killed in a gunfight because his revolver ran dry. The lower capacity of the revolver simply isn't an issue for civilian self-defense. Some people strap on a high-capacity bullet hose with enough spare magazines to be able to fight off a platoon of terrorists at the food court, but statistically and practically, you're at no disadvantage with a five-shot snubbie in one pocket, and a speedloader in the other.

To be sure, every weapons system has its disadvantages, but most of the perceived drawbacks of the revolver are almost entirely theoretical, and have little to no bearing on the average civilian self-defense scenario. The revolver does, however, have some undeniable advantages over the autoloader, and those are far more relevant to the equation.

THE REVOLVER IS SIMPLE

Simplicity is good when it comes to defensive tools. A revolver is generally as simple as it gets: draw the weapon, and start pulling the trigger. There are no safeties to manipulate, no slides to rack, and no superfluous bits and pieces. The revolver has precisely one external control, and that's the cylinder release. It's easy to teach to novice shooters, and difficult to mess up under stress. You can see the brass rims of the cartridges at a glance, so you can instantly verify the loading status with a visual check, and you can instantly render the gun inert by simply swinging out the cylinder.

THE REVOLVER IS RELIABLE

Semi-auto pistols have come a very long way, but even the most reliable pistol can only ever hope to equal the reliability of a good revolver. The revolver will fire upside down, from inside a coat pocket, touching a doorframe or firing port, or jammed into an attacker's ribcage. Limp-wristing has no effect on a revolver. It will function flawlessly with full-power defensive loads, soft target loads, snake shot, full wadcutter bullets, specialty rounds such as Glasers, or all of the above in the same cylinder. There are no feed ramps to consider, no magazine springs to weaken, and no recoil springs to wear out.

THE REVOLVER IS A SELF-CONTAINED SYSTEM

There are no magazines to break or lose. The magazine is a great strength of the autoloader for speed of reloads, but also its greatest weakness. Bend the feed lips, overstress or weaken the magazine spring, or lose the magazine altogether, and you have a single-shot handgun that's slow and cumbersome to load. The revolver's ammunition storage, on the other hand, is integral to the weapon, and much more robust than the most sturdy pistol magazine.

There's no need to find the kind of magazine your gun "likes," and no need to spend a hundred dollars or more on an adequate supply of spare magazines.

THE REVOLVER IS ERGONOMIC

There are some very ergonomic pistol designs on the market, but they still don't match the ergonomics potential of a gun where you can have a custom grip made that is molded off your own hand.

THE REVOLVER HAS A SIMPLE FAILURE DRILL

Revolver doesn't go bang when trigger is pulled? Pull the trigger again. A revolver also doesn't have Type II "failure to eject" malfunctions (it doesn't eject cartridges like a semi does), or Type III "failure to feed" malfunctions (it has no feed ramp). It's true that revolvers can have their own malfunctions that are tricky to fix quickly, like an empty caught under the ejector star or an ejector rod coming unscrewed, but those kinds of problems are much less common than the various autoloader maladies, and the ones I mentioned can be prevented by proper technique and a dab of Loctite, respectively.

THE REVOLVER HAS A BETTER POWER-TO-WEIGHT RATIO

You just can't get an autoloader that offers .357 Magnum power in a 13-ounce frame. You also can't get an autoloader at all that offers .454 Casull or .500 S&W power. More importantly, the reliability of an autoloader seems to decline as the size of the weapon decreases, especially when the pistol is chambered for a major defensive caliber. A pocketable autoloader is generally less reliable than a full-sized one, but a pocket revolver is just as reliable as its bigger counterparts.

THE REVOLVER DOESN'T FLING BRASS

This is more a secondary advantage, but it is related to the value of the revolver as a self-defense tool. A revolver is the best handgun for the reloader, because it doesn't throw your brass all over the range. Revolver shooters don't need to bend over or crawl around on a darkened range floor, picking up brass, checking for headstamps, and competing against the Common Brass Hound, which can be found at every indoor range in the country. If you get to keep your brass, and you don't have to spend precious range time tracking it down, you reload more, which means that you'll save money and end up shooting more. Practice leads to skill, and skill leads to better odds in a self-defense situation.

The next time someone approaches you on the firing line and proclaims your revolver to be "old-fashioned" or "obsolete," tell him that reliability and simplicity aren't old-fashioned and obsolete concepts. Ask him if his gun will feed any ammunition in its caliber available on the gun store shelf. Ask him if his pistol will work in a coat pocket, upside down, or shoved into the gut of someone who's trying to strangle him. Ask him if his gun is ready to save his life right this second, with no room or time for doubt about whether there's a round ready to go, or a safety to flick, or a magazine to seat. Ask him if he'd bet his life on the reliability of his pistol.

If he answers "no" to any of those questions... tell him to get a revolver. **DP**