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Revolvers and Pistols: How Do They Compare?

By Rachel Mauldin

When I was a child, much of my free time was spent with my father in his business. He worked with guns. Mostly, he cleaned and repaired rifles, shotguns, and revolvers. So growing up, I didn't have much chance to learn about semiautomatic pistols. As I've grown older, however, I've encountered more chances to obtain knowledge about semiautomatic handguns. Almost all law enforcement agencies utilize semiautomatic pistols, so I also had a stake in gaining as much knowledge about these machines as possible. I personally prefer pistols to revolvers, and would recommend them for use, as well. When faced with a life or death situation, a pistol would serve a home or business owner better, due to its convenience, maintenance, reliability and capacity. Of course, before finding oneself in a like situation, it is highly recommended that he or she undergo firearms training. Proper and thorough firearms training works for a person like a solid foundation works for a house: without it, there is no reason to go any further.

A major difference between the two firearms is convenience. While revolvers may afford the handler only a small deal more control due to the fact that he or she would have to re-cock the firearm between shots, semiautomatic pistols are much more convenient when it comes to "rapid fire." Just the other night I was walking down a dark alley when I saw a pair of headlights turn toward me. My heartbeat increased, all my senses came on full alert, and my first thought was, "What will I do if the person driving that vehicle tries to attack me? I'm not armed in any way." I would have been sorry if the driver was actually packing heat. As it turned out, the person meant me no harm. But let's assume we were both armed; I with a revolver, and her with a semiautomatic handgun. Because it was dark, I would have to make a fairly good guess about where that person would be after getting out of the vehicle, and at first I would have only one shot. Had the driver been intent on harming me, she could have gotten two shots off in the time it took me to discharge one. Pistols, assuming they are reliable and cleaned properly, allow the handler easy access to more rounds if they are needed.

Another aspect of firearms to keep in mind is maintenance. Like every machine, firearms need regular maintenance, especially if used often. All guns should be properly and thoroughly cleaned after every trip to the range, or between uses. Revolvers are rather "easy" to clean in comparison to semiautomatic handguns. Cleaning is more involved when it comes to pistols. Gun cleaning kits can be found at your local gun range or sporting store. One requisite for obtaining a gun permit includes successfully completing a course in training. Course instructors teach potential gun owners how to clean his or her firearm(s).

Because semiautomatic handguns need more maintenance and have a more complex structure, that means there is also more of a potential for something to go wrong at inopportune times. This is where reliability becomes an important factor. Six guns (another name for revolvers), however, tend to be fairly reliable unless they aren't cleaned properly. Imitation firearms also tend to be more at risk for jams, backfires, etc. Just a couple of weeks ago, my father and I were out practicing with one of his rifles and his semiautomatic pistol. He had only discharged a round or two from the pistol when one shell got caught trying to eject from the barrel. This particular firearm is not a name brand, so there was no guarantee as to its reliability in action. So while name brand guns may cost a bit more, if it saves a life (or several) isn't it worth it? Overall, if you treat your handgun well, it will take care of you.

The last (but certainly not least) characteristic of firearms to be considered is capacity. Revolvers hold a maximum of six shots or rounds, while pistols can hold at least 10 in one magazine. Some magazines have the capacity for 17 rounds. Capacity does differ depending on the caliber of the round and the manufacturer of the firearm, but semiautomatic pistols have, by far, the biggest capacity when it comes to handguns.

Taking into consideration convenience, maintenance, reliability, and capacity, semiautomatic handguns are without a doubt the more desirable of the two options. Simply because semiautomatic handguns require a bit more maintenance doesn't mean they should be disregarded based solely on that requirement. Since they are the better choice on three out of four points of comparison, I would say they are the better overall choice.

