The FBI "Approved" List of Self-Defense Ammunition

The CRITICAL difference between self-defense & practice ammo

When I first started carrying concealed, I put no thought into the ammo that I loaded in my handgun.

My reasoning was that if I — God forbid — had to use my gun to defend myself, then shooting anyone with any type of bullet was going to be “enough”.

And there’s some truth to that …

But then I discovered that the world of self-defense ammo has improved dramatically in the last decade or so.

And I also discovered that guns are not some mystical “one shot, one stop” all-powerful device. That most handguns are actually not that great at stopping people.

And I discovered that if you’re going to trust your life to your gun, you should be able to trust your life to your ammo as well.

In short, there’s a BIG difference between what you should be shooting in practice and what you should be loading in your self-defense handgun …

Here’s what you need to know …

Why modern ammo makes the 9mm, 40 S&W, .45 ACP debate pointless

When we talk about guns and self-defense ammo we want the best terminal ballistics available.

Basically, if a bad person is attacking you, you want every shot to do the most damage to them and have the best chance of “neutralizing” the threat (whether they die, feel pain, or any of that is irrelevant, as long as they are stopped is the key).

The fact is that we carry handguns not because they are the best way to stop people but because they’re easy to carry and conceal. If we wanted the best “man stoppers” we’d all carry rifles or shotguns.

But we can’t so we have to rely on handguns. And — in general — all handguns are pretty weak when it comes to stopping people. That’s true for 9mm, .40, .357, .45, etc — everything.

That’s why caliber debates have been all the rage for gun owners for practically forever. Again, I never paid much attention, and truthfully I’m glad I didn’t because now with today’s modern ammo, 9mm works just as well as anything.

Why I am biased towards 9mm for handguns …

First off, I started shooting 9mm when I first started shooting guns as a kid. So there's that …

Second, 9mm is the cheapest. For your "self defense" ammo, this isn't a big deal because you hopefully won't ever shoot much of it. But for your practice ammo it certainly is because the more you can buy of ammo the more you can practice. With .45 being up to 50% more than 9mm you can see how that's a big deal …

Third, many people assume the 40 S&W is better than 9mm because of the shift of almost all Law Enforcement over to this ammo during the mid 90's. However, the truth is that the 40 S&W's popularity is almost completely because of the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban and the magazine limitation capacity it imposed.

Firearms trainer Todd Green explains it well:

> "The AWB allowed gun manufacturers to buy back previously issued LE magazines and resell them on the commercial market. That made all those used, abused, high capacity magazines worth their weight in gold. So manufacturers went to agencies and offered to trade them, at no cost, new & improved big-caliber guns for their wimpy little 9mms. The agency got a new gun that fit in its current holsters, replacing old and sometimes completely worn out guns. The administrators and union leaders got to parade the new guns in front of the troops as proof that they were Doing Something Important. And the gun companies got a bunch of guns that they could refurbish for a few dollars and then sell for a small mint simply by supplying one of those pre-ban high capacity magazines in the box.
>
> "That's not idle speculation. I worked for two different major handgun manufacturers during the AWB. That's how business was done. It made the companies a lot of money and made the LE customers very happy. And in the process it brainwashed many people into thinking that somehow the 9mm was a spitball while the .40 was a cannonball."

Fourth, anyone who can shoot a .45 or 40 S&W can shoot a 9mm better. There's less recoil, so it's theoretically easier to be fast & accurate.

Fifth, for any given handgun platform, in 9mm you will have MORE rounds in the gun. More bullets means more opportunities to save your life.

Sixth, as I've stated before, all handguns are poor man stoppers but because of modern jacketed hollow point (JHP) ammo technology, 9mm is just as effective as any other "bigger" load (.40, .45, .357, etc)

So the 9mm is cheap, easy to shoot, and effective. What more do you need in a handgun?

The difference between self-defense ammo & practice ammo

Self-defense ammo is just as it sounds, ammo designed for self-defense. It's designed to be the most effective as stopping threats. Let's talk about practice ammo first though.

When it comes to practice ammo — in general — any and all ammo will work for you.

In fact, inside of 15 yards, I don't see much difference between any type of ammo fed through my Glock 19 Gen 4. I've shot 1,000's of rounds of "factory reloaded" ammunition because it's the cheapest thing I can find and it's all reliable and accurate inside of 15 yards.

So for practice ammo, you mainly want 1.) reliability (does the bullet go bang and feed fine in your particular gun?) and 2.) accuracy … and 3.) cheap.

If you're working on your 25 yards or further bullseye work, then I HAVE discovered that certain pistol ammunition is more accurate than others. And you'll have to do some testing yourself to find the load that is the most accurate in your gun.

How to select the right self-defense ammunition

First, what makes a good self-defense load?

The short answer is it should meet and pass the FBI's stringent testing protocol. The FBI requires that ammunition penetrate ballistic gelatin between 12-18 inches with the following requirements:

– penetrate bare ballistic gelatin 12-18″

– penetrate gelatin 12-18″ covered in layers of heavy denim

– penetrate gelatin 12-18″ with steel in front of it

– penetrate gelatin 12-18″ with wall board in front of it

– penetrate gelatin 12-18″ with plywood in front of it

– penetrate gelatin 12-18″ with safety glass in front of it

As you can see, if a load performs well in the FBI test protocol, it will offer the best performance for you no matter what conditions you find yourself in.

Second, you should buy around 500-1,000 rounds of your chosen self-defense ammo, then fire 100-200 rounds for reliability testing in your chosen self-defense weapon.

A good thing to do is to check your Point-of-aim VS your point-of-impact with your handgun sights and your duty ammo at various ranges such as 7 yds, 10 yds, 15 yds, and 25 yds, so you know where it will hit during this testing.

And then you can forget about your self-defense ammo …

Because your everyday carry magazines are loaded up with this ammo, you probably won't ever have to use it. However, you want an adequate supply because you will slowly use it up by following two best practices …

1.) About every year (assuming you don't get in an shootings and burn up that ammo), you should use your loaded self-defense ammunition at the range to run some drills. Check accuracy with your sights again. And basically just make sure the ammo still works. NOTE: this is probably overkill, because I've heard of duty ammo sitting in police officer guns for up to 5 years and still working fine.

2.) Don't unload and reload the same round over and over again. This can lead to bullet setback and cause an overpressure issue with the ammo. So you should develop a rule such as "if I load and unload a cartridge more than twice, I will shoot that bullet at the range next time I go". So you'll go through maybe 1 bullet of your self defense ammo per range trip using this method. Just be sure to load up a fresh one when you leave the range.

More on self-defense ammo & why the FBI switched back to 9mm

When I shared the first few pages of this report with people on my blog, I made the point that you can practice with most any FMJ (full metal jacket) ammo at the range, but you should take advantage of modern JHP (Jacketed Hollow Point) technology when it comes to the ammo you use for self defense.

This would be the ammo that you put in your gun for every day, concealed carry.

And due to today's technology — in fact the great advancements in bullet design since even the 1990's — today's JHP bullets all pretty much perform the same, regardless of handgun caliber.

Therefore, if they all stop a threat equally as well, then one should choose 9mm because of higher capacity, lower cost, easier shootability and possibly more gun durability.

I then received a lot of comments from people still not convinced about the superiority (or at least equivalency) of the 9mm to the .45 for self-defense, such as this:

" … BUT WHEN YOU SEE SO MANY FOLKS WALK INTO THE ER WITH MULTIPLE HITS FROM A 9MM, AND AS THE ER GUYS SAY, THEY GET CARRIED IN WHEN HIT BY A SINGLE 45 CAL …"

And this one …

" … IF ONE DOES NOT HIT CENTER MASS OR THE T, IT STANDS TO REASON THAT A LARGER ROUND WITH MORE MASS CAN AT LEAST "DELAY" A PERP FOR SHOT FOLLOW-UP, ESPECIALLY A PERP DRUGGED-UP; HENCE, THE REASONING FOR THE .45 DEVELOPMENT FOR THE MOROS INSURRECTION IN THE PI BACK IN THE EARLY 1900'S"

And this …

"IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY THE .45 ROUND WAS INVENTED FOR THE U.S. ARMY. TO TAKE DOWN THE DRUGGED UP MORRO TRIBE FIGHTERS .IF THAT ROUND WAS GOOD , THEN, IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME NOW!!!"

While these statements are passionate, I believe they're unfounded …

In short, bullet technology has finally advanced to the point where choosing a round other than 9mm because of worries about stopping power are no longer valid.

Further, there are many other benefits to shooting the 9mm instead that I covered in my last article. But I'm not the only one who believes these things …

In fact, in 2014, the **FBI revealed they were switching BACK to 9mm** after practically leading the entire law-enforcement world to 40 S&W (after the Miami shootout in 1986 that led to them practically inventing modern ammunition testing because they were looking for a "better" caliber).

Below is the FBI's carefully crafted letter, sent to other agencies, explaining their move back to 9mm …

> **FBI 9MM Justification**
>
> FBI Training Division: FBI Academy, Quantico, VA
>
> **Executive Summary of Justification for Law Enforcement Partners**
>
> *** Caliber debates have existed in law enforcement for decades
>
> *** Most of what is "common knowledge" with ammunition and its effects on the human target are rooted in myth and folklore
>
> *** Projectiles are what ultimately wound our adversaries and the projectile needs to be the basis for the discussion on what "caliber" is best
>
> *** In all the major law enforcement calibers there exist projectiles which have a high likelihood of failing LEO's in a shooting incident and there are projectiles which have a high ting incident likelihood of succeeding for LEOs in a shooting incident
>
> *** Handgun stopping power is simply a myth
>
> *** The single most important factor in effectively wounding a human target is to have penetration to a scientifically valid depth (FBI uses 12" – 18")
>
> *** LEOs miss between 70 – 80 percent of the shots fired during a shooting incident
>
> *** Contemporary projectiles (since 2007) have dramatically increased the terminal effectiveness of many premium line law enforcement projectiles (emphasis on the 9mm Luger offerings)

*** 9mm Luger now offers select projectiles which are, under identical testing conditions, I outperforming most of the premium line .40 S&W and .45 Auto projectiles tested by the FBI

*** 9mm Luger offers higher magazine capacities, less recoil, lower cost (both in ammunition and wear on the weapons) and higher functional reliability rates (in FBI weapons)

*** The majority of FBI shooters are both FASTER in shot strings fired and more ACCURATE with shooting a 9mm Luger vs shooting a .40 S&W (similar sized weapons)

*** There is little to no noticeable difference in the wound tracks between premium line law Auto enforcement projectiles from 9mm Luger through the .45 Auto

*** Given contemporary bullet construction, LEO's can field (with proper bullet selection) 9mm Lugers with all of the terminal performance potential of any other law enforcement pistol caliber with none of the disadvantages present with the "larger" calibers

Justification for Law Enforcement Partners

Rarely in law enforcement does a topic stir a more passionate debate than the choice of handgun caliber made by a law enforcement organization. Many voice their opinions by repeating the old adage "bigger is better" while others have "heard of this one time" where a smaller caliber failed and a larger caliber "would have performed much better." Some even subscribe to the belief that a caliber exists which will provide a "one shot stop." It has been stated, "Decisions on ammunition selection are particularly difficult because many of the pertinent issues related to handguns and ammunition are firmly rooted in myth and folklore." This still holds as true today as it did when originally stated 20 years ago.

Caliber, when considered alone, brings about a unique set of factors to consider such as magazine capacity for a given weapon size, ammunition availability, felt recoil, weight and cost. What is rarely discussed, but most relevant to the caliber debate is what **projectile** is being considered for use and its terminal performance potential.

One should never debate on a gun make or caliber alone. The projectile is what wounds and ultimately this is where the debate/discussion should focus. In each of the three most common law enforcement handgun calibers (9mm Luger, .40 Smith & Wesson and .45 AUTO) there are projectiles which have a high likelihood of failing law enforcement officers and in each of these three calibers there are projectiles which have a high likelihood of succeeding for law enforcement officers during a shooting incident. The choice of a service projectile must undergo intense scrutiny and scientific evaluation in order to select the best available option.

Understanding Handgun Caliber Terminal Ballistic Realities

Many so called "studies" have been performed and many analyses of statistical data have been undertaken regarding this issue. Studies simply involving shooting deaths are irrelevant since the goal of law enforcement is to stop a threat during a deadly force encounter as quickly as possible. Whether or not death occurs is of no consequence as long as the threat of death or serious injury to law enforcement personnel and innocent third parties is eliminated.

"The concept of immediate incapacitation is the only goal of any law enforcement shooting and is the underlying rationale for decisions regarding weapons, ammunition, calibers and training."1

Studies of "stopping power" are irrelevant because no one has ever been able to define how much power, force, or kinetic energy, in and of itself, is required to effectively stop a violent and determined adversary quickly, and even the largest of handgun calibers are not capable of delivering such force. **Handgun stopping power is simply a myth**. Studies of so-called "one shot stops" being used as a tool to define the effectiveness of one handgun cartridge, as opposed to another, are irrelevant due to the inability to account for psychological influences and due to the lack of reporting specific shot placement.

In short, extensive studies have been done over the years to "prove" a certain cartridge is better than another by

using grossly flawed methodology and or bias as a precursor to manipulating statistics. In order to have a meaningful understanding of handgun terminal ballistics, one must only deal with facts that are not in dispute within the medical community, i.e. medical realities, and those which are also generally accepted within law enforcement, i.e. tactical realities.

Medical Realities

Shots to the Central Nervous System (CNS) at the level of the cervical spine (neck) or above, are the only means to reliably cause immediate incapacitation. In this case, any of the calibers commonly used in law enforcement, regardless of expansion, would suffice for obvious reasons. Other than shots to the CNS, the most reliable means for affecting rapid incapacitation is by placing shots to large vital organs thus causing rapid blood loss. Simply stated, shot placement is the most critical component to achieving either method of incapacitation.

Wounding factors between rifle and handgun projectiles differ greatly due to the dramatic differences in velocity, which will be discussed in more detail herein. The wounding factors, in order of importance, are as follows:

A. Penetration:

A projectile must penetrate deeply enough into the body to reach the large vital organs, namely heart, lungs, aorta, vena cava and to a lesser extent liver and spleen, in order to cause rapid blood loss. It has long been established by expert medical professionals, experienced in evaluating gunshot wounds, that this equates to a range of penetration of 12?18 inches, depending on the size of the individual and the angle of the bullet path (e.g., through arm, shoulder, etc.). With modern properly designed, expanding handgun bullets, this objective is realized, albeit more consistently with some law enforcement projectiles than others. 1 Handgun Wounding Factors and Effectiveness: Firearms Training Unit, Ballistic Research Facility, 1989.

B. Permanent Cavity:

The extent to which a projectile expands determines the diameter of the permanent cavity which, simply put, is that tissue which is in direct contact with the projectile and is therefore destroyed. Coupled with the distance of the path of the projectile (penetration), the total permanent cavity is realized. Due to the elastic nature of most human tissue and the low velocity of handgun projectiles relative to rifle projectiles, it has long been established by medical professionals, experienced in evaluating gunshot wounds, that the damage along a wound path visible at autopsy or during surgery cannot be distinguished between the common handgun calibers used in law enforcement. That is to say an operating room surgeon or Medical Examiner cannot distinguish the difference between wounds caused by .35 to .45 caliber projectiles.

C. Temporary Cavity:

The temporary cavity is caused by tissue being stretched away from the permanent cavity. If the temporary cavity is produced rapidly enough in elastic tissues, the tensile strength of the tissue can be exceeded resulting in tearing of the tissue. This effect is seen with very high velocity projectiles such as in rifle calibers, but is not seen with handgun calibers. For the temporary cavity of most handgun projectiles to have an effect on wounding, the velocity of the projectile needs to exceed roughly 2,000 fps. At the lower velocities of handgun rounds, the temporary cavity is not produced with sufficient velocity to have any wounding effect; therefore any difference in temporary cavity noted between handgun calibers is irrelevant. "In order to cause significant injuries to a structure, a pistol bullet must strike that structure directly."2 2 DiMaio, V.J.M.: Gunshot Wounds, Elsevier Science Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1987, page 42.

D. Fragmentation:

Fragmentation can be defined as "projectile pieces or secondary fragments of bone which are impelled outward from the permanent cavity and may sever muscle tissues, blood vessels, etc., apart from the permanent cavity"3. Fragmentation does not reliably occur in soft tissue handgun wounds due to the low velocities of handgun bullets. When fragmentation does occur, fragments are usually found within one centimeter (.39") of the permanent

cavity.4 Due to the fact that most modern premium law enforcement ammunition now commonly uses bonded projectiles (copper jacket bonded to lead core), the likelihood of fragmentation is very low. For these reasons, wounding effects secondary to any handgun caliber bullet fragmentation are considered inconsequential. 3Fackler, M.L., Malinowski, J.A.: "The Wound Profile: A Visual Method for Quantifying Gunshot Wound Components", Journal of Trauma 25: 522?529, 1958. 4 Handgun Wounding Factors and Effectiveness: Firearms Training Unit, Ballistic Research Facility, 1989.

Psychology

Any discussion of stopping armed adversaries with a handgun has to include the psychological state of the adversary. Psychological factors are probably the most important relative to achieving rapid incapacitation from a gunshot wound to the torso.5 First and foremost, the psychological effects of being shot can never be counted on to stop an individual from continuing conscious voluntary action. Those who do stop commonly do so because they decide to, not because they have to.

The effects of pain are often delayed due to survival patterns secondary to "fight or flight" reactions within the body, drug/alcohol influences and in the case of extreme anger or aggression, pain can simply be ignored. Those subjects who decide to stop immediately after being shot in the torso do so commonly because they know they have been shot and are afraid of injury or death, regardless of caliber, velocity, or bullet design. It should also be noted that psychological factors can be a leading cause of incapacitation failures and as such, proper shot placement, adequate penetration, and multiple shots on target cannot be over emphasized. 5 Ibid.

Tactical Realities

Shot placement is paramount and law enforcement officers on average strike an adversary with only 20 – 30 percent of the shots fired during a shooting incident. Given the reality that shot placement is paramount (and difficult to achieve given the myriad of variables present in a deadly force encounter) in obtaining effective incapacitation, the caliber used must maximize the likelihood of hitting vital

organs. Typical law enforcement shootings result in only one or two solid torso hits on the adversary. This requires that any projectile which strikes the torso has as high a probability as possible of penetrating deeply enough to disrupt a vital organ.

The Ballistic Research Facility has conducted a test which compares similar sized Glock pistols in both .40 S&W and 9mm calibers, to determine if more accurate and faster hits are achievable with one versus the other. To date, the majority of the study participants have shot more quickly and more accurately with 9mm caliber Glock pistols. The 9mm provides struggling shooters the best chance of success while improving the speed and accuracy of the most skilled shooters.

Conclusion

While some law enforcement agencies have transitioned to larger calibers from the 9mm Luger in recent years, they do so at the expense of reduced magazine capacity, more felt recoil, and given adequate projectile selection, no discernible increase in terminal performance.

Other law enforcement organizations seem to be making the move back to 9mm Luger taking advantage of the new technologies which are being applied to 9mm Luger projectiles. These organizations are providing their armed personnel the best chance of surviving a deadly force encounter since they can expect faster and more accurate shot strings, higher magazine capacities (similar sized weapons) and all of the terminal performance which can be expected from any law enforcement caliber projectile.

Given the above realities and the fact that numerous ammunition manufacturers now make 9mm Luger service ammunition with outstanding premium line law enforcement projectiles, the move to 9mm Luger can now be viewed as a decided advantage for our armed law enforcement personnel.

So should you switch to 9mm too?

I'm convinced as I've ever been, I admit it's nice to see the FBI thinks the same way, and I think the benefits of 9mm being cheaper alone — which means you should be able to buy more of it to practice with — are enough to switch to 9mm.

If you still want to stick with your .40 or .45 then I guess you can, but you'll have to admit that there's no real reason other than "I like it" that you're staying with a larger caliber.

In the 21st century, according to the FBI, there are 9mm projectiles that are outperforming most of the premium .40 S&W and .45 Auto projectiles …

In short, as the FBI sums it up by saying "Given contemporary bullet construction, LEO's can field (with proper bullet selection) 9mm Lugers with all of the terminal performance potential of any other law enforcement pistol caliber with none of the disadvantages present with the "larger" calibers"

So what ammunition should you use?

Where is the approved list of self-defense ammo that I've been promising you?

It starts on the next page…

The “approved” list of self-defense ammunition (is your ammo on this list?)

Nothing will divide gun owners like arguing which gun and/or caliber is best.

To recap:

1.) you want to practice with regular FMJ (full metal jacket) ammo because it’s the cheapest …

2.) you want modern JHP (jacketed hollow point) ammo for self-defense

3.) because of bullet projectile technology improvements since 2007 practically all service caliber handgun projectiles perform the same, so I recommend people use 9mm because it’s cheaper, easy to shoot, and gives your more bullets in the same size handgun.

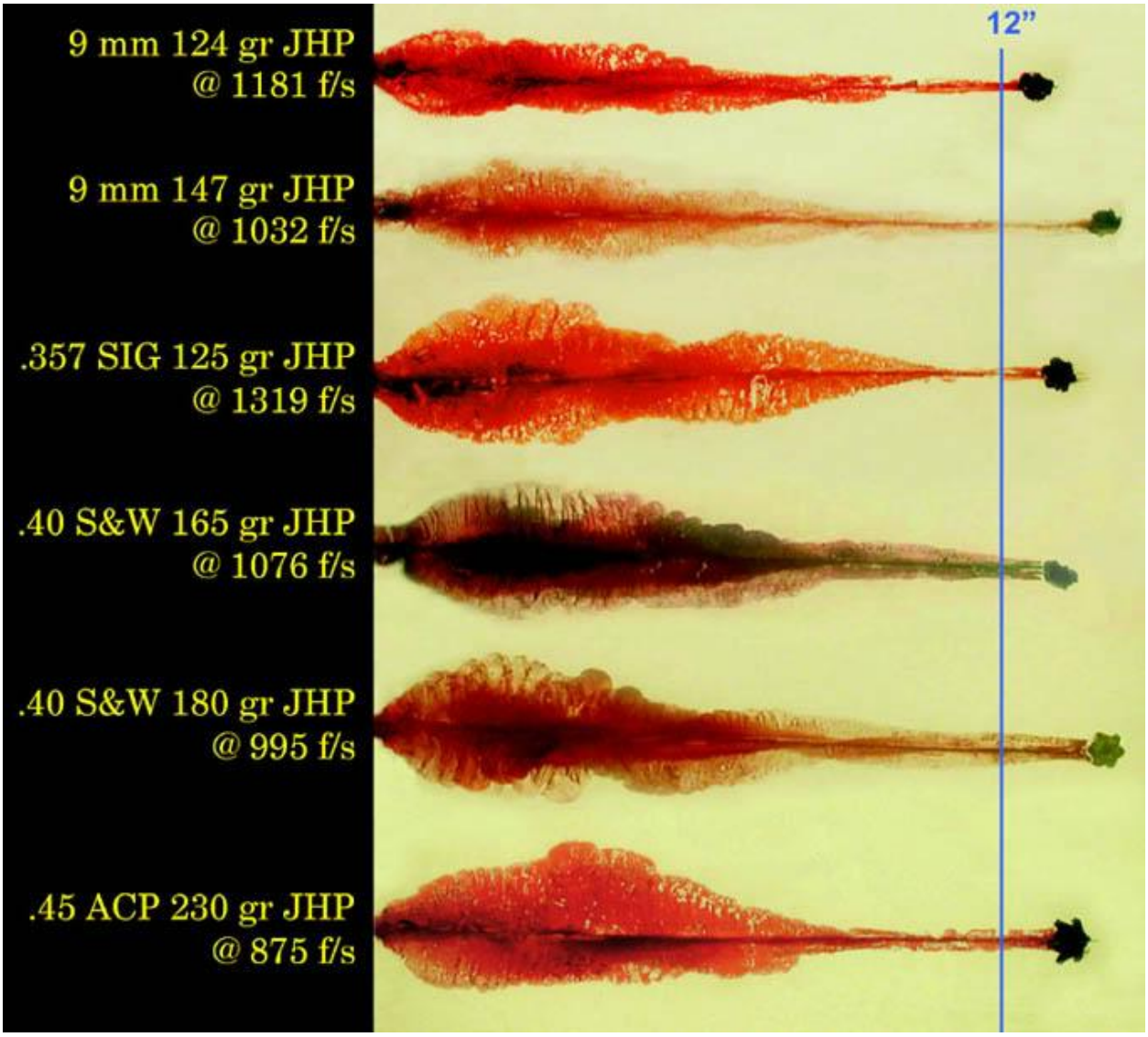
4.) Due to years of ballistic and real world duty testing, there are now “official” lists of proven ammo readily available online that you should use when selecting your self-defense ammo.

In short, if it’s not on the list below, then don’t trust your life to it.

Why bigger bullets do NOT guarantee “one stop shots”

As you’re about to see, all scientific testing on service caliber duty loads performs very, very similar.

The following gel shots by Doug Carr show that when comparing good self-defense ammo from service caliber handgun loads, there are minimal differences in penetration depth and temporary cavity effects …



Yet, there are still people who want to argue this fact. Even though it is fact, not opinion.

I blame Jeff Cooper, the creator of the “modern technique” of handgun shooting. The shooting world owes a lot to Cooper but a couple of the things he preached just won’t “die”. Namely weaver stance and the .45 being a magical bullet that stops everything.

(We’ll cover weaver stance at some other time that I’m ready to receive fresh hate mail, for now I’ll just say that none of the fastest, most accurate shooters in the world use it these days. That’s a clue.)

Jeff Cooper is credited with quotes such as *“any caliber is fine…as long as it starts with a 4 and ends with a 5" and “the .45 ACP will instantly stop 19 out of 20 attackers”*

Now, I greatly respect Cooper, but his beliefs on the superiority of .45 ACP are just unfounded in modern times. He died in 2006, and since that time the improvement in bullet projectiles has made the caliber debate pointless.

Firearms trainer Greg Ellifritz has said, "*No pistol works that well, and there is very little difference in real world "stopping power" between any of the calibers. Check out my study HERE. Most handguns stop fewer than 50% of attackers with one shot. It will generally take 2-3 shots to bring an attacker down. Expect that."*

Why one cop now carries 145 rounds of ammo on the job …

Lastly, I know there are still those of you reading this and about to blow a top because you can't believe that .45 is somehow not a "man stopper" …

I am about to prove to you scientifically that the 9mm is just as effective as the .45 with today's modern ammo, but you'll want to reply with what you know to be true, have seen, or "real world experience" …

Before you do that, you should know about Police Sergeant Timothy Gramin …

Sergeant Gramin used to carry 47 rounds of .45 ammunition while on duty. That was before he got in a gunfight with an attacker who would not go down. The police officer shot the man 14 times with .45-cal. ammunition – six of those hits in supposedly fatal locations.

The final three shots that the police officer fired were into the suspects head — one through each side of his mouth and one through the top of his skull into his brain.

In case you missed that, the officer shot the man 11 times with .45 and then 3 more times in the HEAD before the guy finally stopped fighting.

And lest you try to convince yourself that the attacker was drugged up, to quote the report, *"Remarkably, the gunman was still showing vital signs when EMS arrived. Sheer determination, it seemed, kept him going, for no evidence of drugs or alcohol was found in his system."*

The full story can be found here on PoliceOne.com. But the point is that yes, even the .45 caliber will not guarantee you a "one shot stop".

Oh, and by the way, Sergeant Gramins now carries a 9mm on the job …

> *" … Now unfailingly he goes to work carrying 145 handgun rounds, all 9 mm. These include three extra 17-round magazines for his primary sidearm (currently a Glock 17), plus two 33-round mags tucked in his vest, as well as the backup gun [Glock 26]"*

If you are still convinced that your .45 is better, then there's nothing I can say now that will convince you otherwise, so let's just get to the list (which includes .45 anyways) …

The Approved List of Self-Defense Ammo …

Whether they credit him or not, the entire shooting world–definitely online–owes a lot of gratitude to one Dr. Gary Roberts (aka DocGKR) from FirearmsTactical.com. He is a subject matter expert (SME) on terminal ballistics and much of the testing of modern ammunition we have online comes from him.

He has an approved list that is posted on online forums and is updated as new loads are tested of the "best list" of approved ammo.

Along with the above picture comparison of all service caliber ballistic testing above, DocGKR also says this …

> "As you increase bullet size and mass from 9 mm/357 Sig, to .40 S&W, to .45 ACP, more tissue is crushed, resulting in a larger permanent cavity. In addition, the larger bullets often offer better performance through intermediate barriers. For some, the incremental advantages of the larger calibers are offset by weapon platform characteristics. As is quite obvious from the photo above,NONE of the common service pistol calibers generate temporary cavities of sufficient magnitude to cause significant tissue damage. Anyone interested in this topic should read and periodically re-read, "Handgun Wounding Factors and Effectiveness" by Urey Patrick of the FBI FTU, as this remains the single best discussion of the wound ballistic requirements of handguns used for self-defense — it is available at: http://www.firearmstactical.com/hwfe.htm (link is now dead, it has been re-posted here)"

And gives the following picture to confirm the size difference is truly minimal between mushroomed hollow points:

The good doctor goes on to say this to introduce the list. (**NOTE**: You can click the link for any of these ammunition loads to check if they are in stock at LuckyGunner.com!) …

> **Keeping in mind that handguns generally offer poor incapacitation potential, bullets with effective terminal performance are available in all of the most commonly used duty pistol calibers—pick the one that you shoot most accurately, that is most reliable in the type of pistol you choose, and best suits you likely engagement scenarios.**

The following loads all demonstrate outstanding terminal performance and can be considered acceptable for duty/self-defense use:

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9 mm:

Barnes XPB 115 gr JHP (copper bullet)
Federal Tactical 124 gr JHP (LE9T1)
Federal HST 124 gr +P JHP (P9HST3)
Remington Golden Saber bonded 124 gr +P JHP (GSB9MMD)
Speer Gold Dot 124 gr +P JHP
Winchester Ranger-T 124 gr +P JHP (RA9124TP)
Winchester 124 gr +P bonded JHP (RA9BA)
Winchester Ranger-T 127 gr +P+ JHP (RA9TA)
Federal Tactical 135 gr +P JHP (LE9T5)
Hornady Critical Duty 135 gr +P PT
Federal HST 147 gr JHP (P9HST2)
Remington Golden Saber 147 gr JHP (GS9MMC)
Speer Gold Dot 147 gr JHP
Winchester Ranger-T 147 gr JHP (RA9T)
Winchester 147 gr bonded JHP (RA9B/Q4364)

.40 S&W:

Barnes XPB 140 & 155 gr JHP (copper bullet)
Speer Gold Dot 155 gr JHP
Federal Tactical 165 gr JHP (LE40T3)
Speer Gold Dot 165 gr JHP
Winchester Ranger-T 165 gr JHP (RA40TA)
Federal HST 180 gr JHP (P40HST1)
Federal Tactical 180 gr JHP (LE40T1)
Remington Golden Saber 180 gr JHP (GS40SWB)
Speer Gold Dot 180 gr JHP
Winchester Ranger-T 180 gr JHP (RA40T)
Winchester 180 gr bonded JHP (RA40B/Q4355/S40SWPDB1)

.45 ACP:

Barnes XPB 185 gr JHP (copper bullet)
Hornady Critical Duty 220 gr +P JHP
Federal HST 230 gr JHP (P45HST2)
Federal HST 230 gr +P JHP (P45HST1)
Federal Tactical 230 gr JHP (LE45T1)
Speer Gold Dot 230 gr JHP
Winchester Ranger-T 230 gr JHP (RA45T)
Winchester Ranger-T 230 gr +P JHP (RA45TP)

Notes:

– Obviously, clone loads using the same bullet at the same velocity work equally well (ie. Black Hills ammo using Gold Dot bullets, Corbon loads using Barnes XPB bullets, etc…)

– **Bullet designs like the Silver Tip, Hydra-Shok, and Black Talon were state of the art 15 or 20 years ago.** These older bullets tend to plug up and act like FMJ projectiles when shot through heavy clothing; they also often have significant degradation in terminal performance after first passing through intermediate barriers. Modern ammunition which has been designed for robust expansion against clothing and intermediate barriers is significantly superior to the older designs. The bullets in the Federal Classic and Hydrashok line are outperformed by other ATK products such as the Federal Tactical and HST, as well as the Speer Gold Dot; likewise Winchester Ranger Talons are far superior to the old Black Talons or civilian SXT's.

_____-

Basically all the standard service calibers work when using good quality ammunition.

Here are some useful resources:

http://www.winchester.com/Site…-SWFs/law_bullit.swf
http://winchesterle.com/SiteCollecti…20Protocol.pdf
http://le.atk.com/wound_ballistics/l…omparison.aspx
http://le.atk.com/resources/videos.aspx
http://le.atk.com/resources/technical_bulletins.aspx

The keys are:

— Cultivate a warrior mindset

— Invest in competent, thorough initial training and then maintain skills with regular ongoing practice

— Acquire a reliable and durable weapon system

— Purchase a consistent, robust performing duty/self-defense load in sufficient quantities (at least 1000 rounds) then STOP worrying about the nuances of handgun ammunition terminal performance.

What if your ammo is not on this list?

First, don't panic, because it might not suck …

There are several rounds that are not listed because while they may be good they were not found to be the "best" of the same brand …

For example, Speer Gold Dots. The approved list only has "Speer Gold Dot 124 gr +P JHP" but you will absolutely be fine if you can only acquire the standard loading (not +P) "Speer Gold Dot 124 gr JHP". The list just lets you know that you should look for the +P version and prefer it over the standard loading of speer gold dots if you can find it.

In fact, I could not find the +P loading at all last time I bought self-defense ammo so I'm carrying standard pressure Speer Gold Dot 124 gr JHP and it's fine.

I would say that you are "most likely" going to be safe if you carry any defensive JHP round from Speer Gold Dot, Federal Tactical/Bonded or Winchester Ranger T — as they consistently find their way onto the list. The only other caveat is to generally choose the heavier bullets (for example, with 9mm – usually avoid the 115gr and go with 124gr or 147gr, etc)

That said, if you can find the ammo on the list just get one of the ones on the list and then stop worrying about it!

Save yourself the headache and definitely do NOT choose one of these rounds because you want to use whatever the newest, latest and greatest "just invented, guaranteed man stopper" bullet just came out.