

Gun Evaluation

Gun S & W Model 637 Airweight Caliber 38 Special MSRP \$449.

Accessory – Crimson Trace Laser Grip MSRP \$219. Street price \$170

Date 8/15/12 By Joe Piazza

Construction Materials – Aluminum alloy frame stainless steel cylinder and barrel.

Finish - All parts are matt finish

Specifications

Weight Empty - 15 oz Weight Loaded - 17 oz

Action Type – Double/single action exposed hammer revolver

O/A Length – 6.31” O/A Height – 4.85” Maximum Width - 1.306”

Grip Width - 1.235”

Grip Perception - Comfortable for all but very large hands

Barrel Length – 1.875” Sight Radius - 3.555”

Trigger type and Function - Double/single action

Trigger Weight SA – 1.4 lbs, DA – 6.28 lbs

Trigger Travel

Single action

Pre Engagement Travel - .001” Engagement to Discharge - .004”

Over Travel - .006” Total Travel - .011”

Double Action

Pre Engagement Travel - .449” Engagement to Discharge - .04”

Over Travel - .006” Total Travel - .495”

Trigger Operation Perception - On this type of revolver it is all about the trigger, the trigger, the trigger and if you didn't get that, it's the trigger!!!!!! This one was excellent for a stock revolver, out of the box. This particular example had a trigger very close to a custom trigger job, in single action mode it broke like glass. The double action on this piece is very good for a stock piece and allows the operator, after some practice and technique, to quickly cycle the action and index to the point of sear engagement then requiring an easy and minimally incremental movement to fire, or the piece can be held at this point with little effort, waiting to fire. Trigger smoothness makes or breaks the operability of this type of revolver because the mass of the revolver is minimal and so firearm movement is maximized when the operator is trying to overcome excessive trigger pressure. In my mind you are buying the trigger first and the revolver second.

Capacity - 5 Rds. Cylinder Release – Left side typical S & W

Sights – Frame notch rear, serrated ramp front, Crimson Trace grip laser added

Sight Perception – Listen up Smith!!! The sights on all the older J-frames are *BARLY ADEQUATE* by today's standards. There is no contrast as both front and rear sight are the same color, there is minimal air space between rear notch and front blade which hinders differentiation by lack of separation in 2 metal parts of the exact same color. The color of the sights is another problem as they are matte silver which presents a good sight picture only on black. Many aluminum and stainless frame snub-nosed pistols suffer from this same affliction and silver on silver sights are the absolute worst to use under many conditions and even some much less expensive brands have figured this out and done something about it. Why should I be able to pick up much less expensive snubbie from Jabip and have an excellent sight picture on an obviously inferior firearm?? Older designs by iconic companies are never updated except to fulfill the requirements of the legal department regarding liability, perceived safety or the latest warning blurbs. This is entirely unnecessary and the difference is readily apparent when you look at a S & W 351 PD snubby in 22 mag which has a red fiber optic front sight. How much can a ¼" of fiber optic cost??? Can it be that costly to change the tooling

necessary to carry an improvement over other models and platforms?? Come on Smith, you guys could totally own this niche by migrating innovation. Just had to get this off my chest. This is the reason I added the C/T Laser grips, this did not come as a package. I would have added the C/Ts anyway as I consider laser sights to be indispensable considering the phenomenal advantage they provide in most situations.

Safety – N/A

As Shipped Includes - Lock

Disassembly Time – N/A

Reassembly Time – N/A

Pre Range Impressions - Very positive for this particular piece, but with the addition of a hi-vis front sight it would totally own the lightweight snubbie category.

Hope you're listening Smith!!! Caveat: In prep for this review I looked at 12 different examples of the same piece because I noticed an excessive amount of difference in trigger pull and operational smoothness in the first 2 examples. Sadly, the action and trigger differed so much that it was like handling completely different models from different manufacturers. I really felt that the differences in smoothness of operation, creep, trigger/sear break, double action pull, timing and lock-up tolerances exhibited such a wide degree of variation that one should shop extensively and handle as many examples as possible before deciding to purchase. Handling one example of a Smith revolver cannot be extrapolated into the mean performance of that particular model.

Range Impressions

At 7 to 10 yards it is easy to keep all shots in the head of a standard silhouette target, using the iron sights, firing quickly double action, UNDER THE RIGHT LIGHTING CONDITIONS. Using the C/T Laser sight is a game changer for this piece and certainly extends the operability and increases the speed. Better sights would greatly enhance target acquisition in poor light. Bright red paint on the front sight

improves the sight picture greatly although you have to redo it on occasion based upon the use and holster wear. I am a firm believer in quality laser sights for self defense handguns in any caliber and consider them essential to the mission.

Overall

The 637 Airweight is the quintessential go to carry pistol for versatility and light weight. It is simple enough for the mechanically uninclined and those who are not practiced, experienced or intuitive with firearms. It is powerful enough for most casual scenarios and allows for the ability to mix rounds and fire rounds that will jam a semi auto. Two snake rounds and three hollow points is the mix I carry when camping, trekking, scouting, hiking or bow hunting early season especially in the south. I can carry this piece in a pocket holster, ankle holster or IWB and it completely disappears. With the new snubbie specific, amped up ammo performance, the 38 special has, like most other calibers, gotten more muscle and performance than it ever had in the days of the standard round nose lead projectile load. The Airweight is just slightly bigger than the micro 380s that are so popular but offer ballistic superiority.

While many praise the hammerless versions of the J-frame for carry, I really prefer the exposed hammer and I am willing to put up with the extra little attention it takes to make sure that the hammer doesn't snag clothing on the draw. I know that if I really need a precision shot, be the target animal, vegetable or human, I have a much higher probability of making it without the gun movement produced by the double action and the choked up trigger finger technique required to control that mode of operation. Many think that the J-frame is strictly a 10 yard piece and it is true that it is more difficult to shoot than a larger, more well endowed pistol with good sights, heavier weight and a longer sight radius. But the J-frame is no less accurate than many of it's larger cousins IF YOU CAN CONTROL, AIM AND SHOOT IT ACCURATELY. If the hammer spur is that objectionable a cut off wheel and grinder can disappear the offensive appendage in about 15 minutes or take it to a gunsmith and for 25 bucks the problem is eliminated. The abbreviated hammer will however require a practiced technique utilizing the trigger to index the hammer back to a point where your thumb can

get a purchase on the bobbed stub. That is if you want to retain the capability of the single action. When bobbing the hammer it is important to check the reliability of ignition because the decreased mass of the hammer can decrease the force transferred to the primer, if the spring tension is marginal.

As always the piece you carry should depend on the level of threat anticipated and by all means carry the most powerful piece you can under the circumstances. While I have certainly carried larger calibers under the appropriate circumstances, this platform and caliber has seen way more carrying time and has served me well, putting an end to deer, ground hogs, nutria, raccoons, numerous snakes and most unfortunately a 165 lb Fila Brasileiro.

I was working on a design and construction project in Easton PA, on an estate just south of town on the scenic Delaware River. The estate included a manor house, a very famous, private and exclusive restaurant with a bed and breakfast much like a European castle. Filas are not a common dog and were originally bred to hunt down Jaguars, cattle and runaway slaves in South America and they are known for their extreme physical prowess and size. The Fila was owned by a family member who was not a resident of the estate and in fact had deposited the beast there because it was not fit for his office/home in town. Filas are not very adaptable to the flow of new people and are very protective and defensive of their turf and owners hence they had become a popular breed for drug dealers to own at that time. This was not a dog that should have been on the grounds of a commercial establishment most especially since it had been abused and damaged by a previous owner/drug dealer and was totally untrained as was the current absentee owner. The previous owner had beaten it regularly to bring out the viciousness and in the process had broken its right front leg, so add to the already intimidating demeanor a twisted front leg and defiant temperament. The restaurant and B & B was by appointment only and on this particular day an older lady had come by to make arrangements for a party. Admiring the statuary and gardens, the lady was not paying attention to her path when she wandered into the territory in which the Fila had drawn the line. For reasons we will never know, the Fila decided on that day to act out aggressively and this particular lady became the focus of his pent up aggression. We will never know what pushed the

Fila to knock that lady down but there he was standing over the lady, growling and clacking it's teeth, the lady trembling and crying on the ground. When the estate owner called me from the back and hysterically showed me the situation I must admit that the thought of approaching such a fearsome and capable opponent, with a model 60 stoked with 5 -38 specials was not very appealing. This was clearly a job for a 12 gauge, why the !@#%&&^# would I be carrying a now apparently diminutive 38 in the first place, hindsight is a humbling mirror. That Fila could easily clear the 30 yards that separated us in about a second.

Somewhere during these milliseconds of mental backpedaling, stupidity trumped fear and the trepidation seemed to vanish. After drawing the dog's attention, he moved off of the lady a few yards and I was now the enemy on whom he was focused while the disheveled and petrified lady managed to drag herself towards her car. Teeth barred, growling and drooling, the fila now slowly turned his head towards me and at that moment I had and took a perfect head shot that turned into a perfect ear shot as he moved his head ever so slightly. The Fila Brasileiro has big drooping ears and bleeding profusely as dog ears tend to do, he shook his head and blood covered the stained glass windows of the entrance that now looked like a scene from a Jason movie. In one motion he turned and lunged and just as his massive rear paws left the ground, my 60 was empty as I heard the last click of the hammer go unanswered by any noise or recoil sensation.

He was DOA when he landed on *my* feet but as his stretched out body sailed through the air I really did not know how much fight would land and evidently did not have the time or reflexes to evade anyway!!!

I must also mention that the particular 60 had also survived a canoe wreck (first date with my 4th wife) and an extensive mud bath (sinking a track hoe into a mud pit). Had I been carrying a 380 on that particular day, it is entirely possible that someone else would be telling this story with a very different ending.

Don't let plastic, high tech autos deter you from purchasing a solid, reliable, uncomplicated firearm and one that may be the perfect choice for the situation at hand or the woman in your life. In an era when everybody seems to be worried about the cool factor or appearance of firearms, some tend to dismiss revolvers

as past technology. The 637 Airweight even with the sight criticism, is to me the ideal permutation of the J-frame snubbie and replacing it with a micro 380 gets me 1 more shot at half the umph. With the addition of the Crimson Trace laser grips; this piece is a serious, deadly and reliable modern defensive tool. Smith, if you're listening, update the freekin sights. We know you sell a similar package with the laser but that should be an enhancement not a compensation.