

SHIELD SEQUEL

S&W's smallest M&P45 is back and better than ever with an integral laser BY GREG LICKENBROCK



Smith & Wesson's M2.0 upgrades include a redesigned slide, more aggressive grip texturing and a better trigger. On top of all that, the test model sports a green Crimson Trace laser.



SPEC BOX

S&W M&P45 SHIELD M2.0 WITH CRIMSON TRACE LASER

CALIBER:	.45 ACP
BARREL:	3.3 inches
OA LENGTH:	6.5 inches
WEIGHT:	23.1 ounces (empty)
STOCK:	Polymer
SIGHTS:	Three-dot
ACTION:	Striker-fired
FINISH:	Matte black
CAPACITY:	6+1, 7+1
MSRP:	\$549

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	ACCURACY
Black Hills 185 TAC-XPD +P	3.13
Black Hills 135 HoneyBadger	1.50
Black Hills 230 JHP	2.50
Hornady 185 XTP	2.25
HSM 230 FMJ	2.90
Remington 185 Golden Saber JHP	2.10

Bullet weight measured in grains and accuracy in inches for best five-shot groups at 15 yards.

Fender or Gibson? Mercedes or BMW? Beatles or Elvis? You can only pick one.

We're used to these simplified matchups in our society. Sure, there are countless other guitars, cars and musicians, but it's simply more entertaining to try to narrow down the selection process in terms of popularity. And when it comes to guns, if I had to guess what a random person was carrying concealed in an IWB or OWB holster, fanny pack or "Shoot me first!" photographer's vest, I'd probably go with either a Glock or a Smith & Wesson M&P Shield.

The Shield has been extremely popular for a number of reasons. The first dozen probably relate to its aesthetics compared to its blocky Austrian counterparts. Then you have its size

and handling. Whether it's a 9mm, .40 S&W or .45 ACP, it isn't hard to hit what you're aiming at with a Shield, even under pressure. I've also never seen a Shield choke, and you can find one at practically every range excursion. But there's always room for improvement, and instead of sitting on its laurels and boasting that it achieved "perfection," Smith & Wesson has brought its M2.0 upgrades to the Shield series.

FULLY LOADED

In late 2017, the 9mm M&P9 Shield M2.0 hit the market with several enhancements over the original, including new slide styling with front and rear fish-scale-like serrations. The slide and barrel are both coated in matte black Armornite to resist corrosion and ease cleaning duties. The grip frame features wraparound texturing that is a

little more aggressive, and the trigger has been redesigned for a lighter pull and a more tactile, audible reset. Internally, the stainless steel chassis, which holds the fire control group, has been extended so the surrounding polymer frame flexes less while firing. Smith & Wesson offers models with and without thumb safeties.

But, to quote the late, great Billy Mays, that's not all. While the M&P9 Shield M2.0 comes with drift-adjustable three-dot sights, you can also buy a version with a Crimson Trace laser built into the dust cover. Both red and green lasers are available with large, stupid-proof activation buttons on both sides, just in front of the triggerguard. Press one of the buttons once for constant-on operation, twice for strobe and a third time to shut the laser off entirely. You can easily reach the activation but-

tons with your trigger finger, too. And yet the cost difference between standard and red-laser-equipped models is just \$20. Which is insane. This isn't some drunk-purchase-on-Amazon-at-3-a.m. laser. It's from Crimson Trace.

Well, the 9mm is fine for most people, but some shooters want a bit more kick. Smith & Wesson also offers .40 S&W variants, but those who regularly knock down steel targets and go on and on (and on) about John Moses Browning wanted a .45 ACP version like that in the original Shield series, and Smith & Wesson answered the call in the second half of 2018.

The new M&P45 Shield M2.0 has all of the same features of its 9mm and .40 S&W brethren, except for the obviously wider bore and smaller magazine capacity. The gun comes with a flush-fitting six-round magazine as well

as an extended seven-rounder with texturing on its baseplate that matches the grip's. It's also worth noting that both magazines have witness holes and bright-orange followers that you can't miss when the slide locks back after firing the last round.

While it's always nice to have an extra level of safety, I requested a model without a thumb safety for testing. I also asked to try out one of the new .45-caliber Shields with a Crimson Trace laser built into the dust cover. But red or green? I chose the latter because the human eye can pick up green faster and distinguish between its many shades more easily thanks to evolution. As you've probably heard, our ancestors needed an edge when it came to discerning plant from predator.

As mentioned, it's easy to hit the green laser's big green activation

button with your trigger finger, but more noticeable is the gun's overall width. The frame is only 0.99 inches wide, and including the slide stop brings the width to 1.05 inches. That's pretty incredible for a concealed-carry pistol, especially one chambered in .45 ACP. Then you have the 18-degree grip angle, which

fits my hands well and promotes natural aiming, and the three-dot sights are easy to pick up in a hurry.

Finally, you can take the pistol down in the usual way by unloading the pistol, locking the slide back, flipping the take-down lever, pulling the trigger and removing the slide. Or you can avoid pulling



↑ Because of its location, it's easy to hit the laser's large activation button with your trigger finger. You can do it without looking.

the trigger altogether by flipping a little lever inside to deactivate the sear prior to removing the slide. I know that's a big issue for some law enforcement armors. Either way—and I wish I didn't have to say this—make sure the gun's completely empty before you try to take it down.

PERFORMANCE

As you can probably guess, the M&P45 Shield M2.0 fit my medium-sized hands like a glove. Not too big, not too small. And this perfect fit helped in the recoil department. Sure, the gun can be a little snappy if you don't hold it right, but with a firm grip, you won't notice the .45 ACP recoil. Seriously. I could keep all of my shots on target while shooting with just one hand from 3 yards out to 25. After a little bit of a break-in period, double- and triple-taps came naturally.

To test the gun's accuracy, I fired five-shot groups at 15 yards with a few different loads from Barnes, Black Hills, Hornady, HSM and Remington. No, I didn't use a rest; I fired every group off-hand. So, this is mostly a test of my skills and not the gun's inherent accuracy. But I feel it's important to see how the gun will run and feel in a realistic self-defense setting. Unless you're being assaulted by an octogenarian, you probably won't have time to set up a Ransom rest and fire back.

Using just the three-dot sights, my tightest five-shot group—1.5 inches at 15 yards—came with Black Hills' 135-grain HoneyBadger rounds, which look awesome and are quite light on recoil. These rounds have specially scalloped projectiles for optimum penetration. I highly recommend trying these out in any .45 ACP, especially since I've yet to have them hang up on any feed ramps in test guns. Remington's 185-grain Golden Saber JHPs came in second place with a 2.1-inch group.

The gun was accurate and relatively easy to handle. It never missed a beat, either, with any of the test ammo—FMJs, hollow points, you name it. In all, I fired about 300 rounds for a good indication of the gun's reliability, though it's by no means a full-on durability test.

The laser is an interesting addition because it allows you to make accurate shots in situations where you can't use your iron sights, for example. I'm hard-wired to always go for the iron sights, but

leaning on the laser was intuitive after some practice. It also allowed me to get accurate hits out 25 yards—where the laser comes zeroed from the factory, though S&W includes a small wrench so you can make windage and elevation adjustments as needed. I even decided to shoot a rapid-fire group at 25 yards using just the laser, and while I created a vertical string that was a little low, my hits were very close together.

TREAT YOURSELF

I had a lot of fun with the green-laser-equipped M&P45 Shield M2.0—to the point where I killed the laser's CR1/3N lithium battery, which is rated for a run time of two hours. Whoops. Thankfully, the iron sights were dead-on target, too.

I even used this gun to teach my girlfriend how to shoot. The laser allowed me to monitor her grip, trigger pull and sight alignment, and she didn't have any issues with the .45 ACP recoil. This is a testament to the gun's ease of use.



← A port at the rear of the barrel hood lets you see if a round is loaded in the chamber.

I wouldn't hesitate to carry this S&W every day because it's effective, accurate and will get the job done in a crisis. That's a ringing endorsement from someone who has tested all manner of firearms. I'm as jaded as they come, and this gun put a smile on my face. For more information, visit smith-wesson.com.

BETTER WITH VEDDER



→ **Every holster needs a gun.** That's just common sense. Don't be that guy who, at my last indoor range visit, plopped his Ruger SR22 right down on the glass countertop in nothing more than a plastic grocery bag—loose rounds and all. I was horrified, and every jaw in the place had to be scooped off the ground.

These days, everyone and their grandmother is offering Kydex and leather holsters. ("Get back to work, Gam Gam!") But if you want something that stands out, I'd suggest Vedder Holsters. This is a one-stop shop for IWB and OWB rigs, magazine pouches and everything else you need to carry your gun in comfort and style. And when I say "style," I don't mean basic black. The ordering process on Vedder's website allows you to customize the rig for your exact taste preferences. Seriously, look at all the color and camo options available. It's simply staggering.

Vedder's best-selling holster is the LightTuck IWB, which is made of Kydex so precisely molded that you'll hear a *click* when the gun snaps into position. This rig is also thin and has a built-in sight channel, and you can adjust the retention, cant and ride height. Spring-steel belt clips for 1.5- or 1.75-inch-wide belts are available, and Vedder includes an optional claw attachment that makes contact with the backside of your belt and pants, pulling the grip of the gun closer to your body for better concealment.

The LightTuck IWB is available for dozens of guns, and I couldn't be happier with the basketweave-finished rig I received for carrying my M&P45 Shield M2.0 concealed. (vedderholsters.com) —Greg Lickenbrock