

The Opinion: At the Gun Store - Look for the Smith & Wesson counter top display that has the moldings of the three different grips. This display is designed to allow you to test grip each of the palmswells that come with the M&P 9, or 40. The palmswells are held in place by a rod that runs up from the bottom of the grip. Changing the palmswells involves removing the magazine and turning the rod extension and then pulling it out. Once the rod is out the palmswell can be lifted off from the bottom. Installing or reinstalling is the opposite of removal. The fit is very secure and looks like a one piece molded grip but the palmswell is a little softer than the rest of the grip.

The magazine release is reversible. It is located behind the trigger in what would be considered the "normal" position for polymer pistols. While I would prefer an ambidextrous magazine release like the Ruger SR series, being reversible would be the next best thing. But since I practice shooting with both hands, I'll probably never switch it. I have gotten used to using the left middle finger to release the magazine.

The trigger on the M&P series utilizes a joint that blocks the movement of the trigger until the lower portion is pressed. The trigger has a very clean break. There are two detectible clicks on the reset and you have to get to the second one before you can fire again.

The dust cover has a Picatinny rail for attaching accessories.

The Melonite finish on the stainless steel slide reduces reflection and glare and is very durable. The front of the slide is tapered and that contour blends into the dust cover to aid in holstering.

Standard three dot sight arrangements are in dovetails for drift adjustments. The front sight can be replaced by drifting it out to the ejection port side of the slide. Check the specifications for the model you are looking at because there are different configurations of sights available.

The takedown mechanism is a lever that gets rotated 90 degrees when the slide is locked back. There is a disconnect lever under the breech face that needs to be pulled down when the slide is locked back to disengage the sear. This mechanism negates the need to squeeze the trigger during takedown and possibly prevent a negligent discharge by the less safety conscience.

There is a model that has an ambidextrous thumb safety. Check the configuration before purchasing to make sure you are getting the features you want, or don't want.

Aside from the trigger, one of the great features of this firearm is the ambidextrous slide release. It is uniform on both sides. The feature was engineered in the design and does not look like a kludge added to the right side.

The back of the slide has fish scale serrations that make for a positive grip when manipulating the slide. It is one of physical features that make it easy to identify an M&P pistol.

The M&P 9 and M&P 40 are made on the same frame so their controls are the same. The Compact versions of the M&P 9 and M&P 40 also share the same controls. While the M&P 45 is a bit larger, it also has the same control configuration. The M&P 22 is imported and has a different internal design because of the blow back operation. The grip on the M&P 22 does not utilize the interchangeable palmswells. Its grip is between the Small and Medium configuration.

The M&P series enables you to have the same manual of arms in four different calibers. I think this is an advantage for home defense where there is more than one armed defender, but each defender has a different caliber preference. Being able to operate any available firearm in a stressful situation could be the difference between survival and defeat.

On the Range: The M&P 9 reliably handles all the target rounds from Remington, Winchester, Federal and even Tullammo equally well. If you decide to use the M&P 9 for personal or home defense then you will want to test several brands of self-defense (hollow point) ammunition to be assured of reliable function. You should do that with any gun. This advice is not unique for Smith & Wesson.

Accuracy and precision are on par or better than other handguns of this size. It would be suitable to get you through any of the Winchester/NRA qualifications that use a pistol.

Look at the law enforcement personnel in your area and you are very likely to see one or the other of a municipal or county organization using the M&P (probably in .40 S&W) as their sidearm. When you get into the legal aspects of self-defense and defending yourself in a courtroom, you can find precedent for using the same firearm as the local law enforcement agency. Not saying this will help you or hurt your defense, that depends upon the 12 people chosen for your jury. I'm not a lawyer and this is not legal advice. Just something else to consider.

When evaluating the M&P 9 versus the M&P 40, there is some added value to getting the 40. If you can spend another couple hundred dollars you could end up with one firearm capable of firing .40 S&W and 9mm. Two companies make conversion barrels for the M&P 40, either the full size or the compact version. Storm Lake and Lone Wolf manufacture conversion barrels for M&P and Glock models. They also make replacement barrels so make sure you get a **conversion** barrel to go from .40 S&W to 9mm Luger. With a barrel change and a magazine suitable for the caliber you can shoot .40 S&W or 9mm Luger from the same grip and slide.

The difference between shooting .40 S&W and 9mm is most noticeable in the compact version. While the extra energy of the .40 S&W produced much more muzzle flip in the compact version, the 9mm compact was a pleasure to shoot.

I haven't done the cost benefit analysis to determine how much .40S&W ammo you would have to shoot to cover the cost of the conversion barrel and magazine. But it is a less expensive option than the purchase of a separate firearm.

The MSRP on the base configuration in August 2014 was **\$569**. In store pricing in the Tampa Florida market ranged from \$479 to \$500. That puts the basic M&P between the lower priced Ruger SR 9 and usually higher priced Glock 17 (as well as others).

The package includes two 17 round magazines, (10 rounds in restrictive states), three palmswells, Instruction Manual, and a plastic storage box.

Twice I have been asked to make a specific recommendation for a semi-automatic handgun. Instead of making a recommendation, I've asked the potential purchasers to compare, and then at least dry fire or rent and live fire the Ruger SR, M&P, and Glock lines along with any other. In both cases they ended up choosing the M&P 9. - Greg Poole, September 2, 2014