

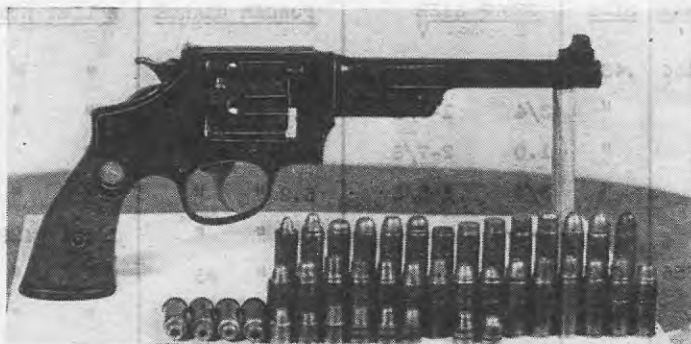
# THE S & W TRIPLE-LOCK AND THE .44 SPECIAL CARTRIDGE

By GORDON C. BOSER

BACK IN THE EARLY TWENTIES, when I first saw the Smith & Wesson Triple-Lock revolver, I decided that if ever I found one of these guns in perfect or near-perfect condition it would be mine. As the years went by I saw several Triple-Lock guns, all with ruined barrels, but with the tightest cylinders and cranes that I ever saw on any gun of the double-action type. In April, 1943, when a dealer showed me a perfect Triple-Lock, Target model, in original condition, it didn't take long to make a deal.

This arm has some special features very much to my liking. It has a groove diameter of .431" to correspond to a bullet cylinder throat of .432"; a perfect setup for a groove-diameter-sized bullet. It is head spaced to .009", with a barrel-cylinder joint of .003". The cylinder and barrel align perfectly at all chambers; and, above all, it is one of the few .44 Special Smith & Wesson guns that do not lead regardless of the type of lubricant used.

This particular gun has a very excellent pre-World-War-I blued finish, a three-and-one-half pound pull (smooth as glass), and the action as a whole is superbly smooth. The cylinder chambers are .456". (Factory loaded cartridge cases are .454".) There is absolutely no end play, and the cylinder-stop play is only such as to permit free function. This is the finest double-action revolver I have ever used, and in the .44 Special caliber alone I have owned two Colt Bisleys, six Colt Frontiers, (one fixed up like the .401 Colt mentioned in the April, 1943, issue), one Bisley Frontier Colt, one Colt New Service, one Colt New Service Target, one Model 1926 5-inch incased Smith & Wesson, and two Military Smith & Wessons with fixed sights, besides the Triple-Lock. I have, of course, used many others.



It may be well, first, to distinguish between the Triple-Lock and the present incased Smith & Wesson revolver which is like the Model 1926 and with which the Triple-Lock is often confused. On this model, the incasement, although it is integral with the barrel as on the Triple-Lock, merely houses the ejector rod, adds balance, stiffens the crane a little against forward looseness, and makes for better appearance. It has the same front- and rear-bearing principle as the arms with no incasement. On the modern model, the rear bearing is actuated by a stiff spring, housed within the cylinder bushing, which shoves the bearing back into position. This is the reason for the bent portion of the recoil shield on the left side of the arm: to allow the cylinder to swing out and swing back into position again. The front bearing is the taper type used on all the modern Smith & Wessons.

The thumb latches on the Triple-Lock and the modern gun are alike, but on the Triple-Lock the crane lock and the front bearing are integral, actuated by a stiff spring. This spring at the forward end shoves the rear bearing into position on engagement when the cylinder is in firing position. When swung out, the rear bearing is drawn into the ejector housing. (Incidentally, no bent portion of the shield is needed; it merely adds to the appearance of the arm.)

The front bearing is not wedge-shaped but is a straight pin.

It is much more secure than the wedge type, to my notion. The crane lock is wedge-shaped and engages a hardened die sunk into the crane and held in place by a screw going through the crane from the rear and a groove at the right. This grooved part of the die fits very finely into the frame when the arm is ready for action. It is from this slanted groove that the

THE SMITH & WESSON TRIPLE-LOCK AND CARTRIDGES TESTED THEREIN

Legend: (a) experimental form only. (b) Boser special cavity. (c) original as cast. (d) bullet shown is solid but hollow point has been used. (e) use by writer limited. "Standard" indicates bullets most used by the writer.

Bullets in front row standing and cartridges in second row:

- |                                                        |         |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1—Boser #1 grooveless 227-grain target                 | (a)     |
| 2—Boser #2 grooveless 220-grain solid                  | (a)     |
| 3—Boser #3 grooveless 260-grain solid                  | (a)     |
| 4—Ideal-Boser #429454 241-grain solid Standard         | (a)     |
| 5—Ideal-Boser #429454-R 241-grain solid                | (a)     |
| 6—Bond-Ness #429770-R 230-grain solid                  | (a) (b) |
| 7—Bond-Ness #429770 230-grain solid Standard           | (d)     |
| 8—Boser Swedged 206-grain solid                        | (a)     |
| 9—Boser Swedged 191-grain solid                        | (a)     |
| 10—Bond-A #429750 225-grain hollow point               | (b) (e) |
| 11—Pacific-Sharpe #429244 244-grain hollow point       | (c) (e) |
| 12—Ideal-Keith #429421 230-grain hollow point Standard | (b)     |
| 13—Ideal-Heath #429336 250-grain solid Standard        | (d)     |
| 14—Pacific #429240 235-grain solid                     | (d) (e) |
| 15—Bond-Resser 225-grain solid                         | (d) (e) |

Cartridges in third row:

- |                                                |         |
|------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1—Ideal-Himmelwright #429220 175-grain         | (e)     |
| 2—Bond-B #429750 215-grain                     | (e)     |
| 3—B&M #429240 235-grain Standard               |         |
| 4—Ideal-Anderton #429215 205-grain             |         |
| 5—Pacific B&M #429205 210-grain Standard       | (b) (e) |
| 6—B&M (bevel based) #429205 205-grain Standard | (b)     |
| 7—B&M W. C. #429200 190-grain Standard         |         |
| 8—Ideal W. C. #429348 173-grain                | (e)     |
| 9—Ideal W. C. #429352 245-grain                | (e)     |
| 10—Bond-C W. C. #429655 246-grain Standard     |         |
| 11—B&M #429261 262-grain                       | (e)     |
| 12—Ideal #429383 244-grain                     | (e)     |
| 13—Ideal (Russian) #429251 253-grain Standard  |         |
| 14—R. A. factory loaded                        |         |

Cartridges prone, at left:

- |                                                        |         |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1—Ideal-Boser #429454-R 225-grain hollow point Special | (a) (b) |
| 2—Ideal-Boser #429454 225-grain hollow point Standard  | (b)     |
| 3—Boser #2 grooveless 210-grain hollow point           | (a) (b) |
| 4—Boser #3 grooveless 235-grain hollow point           | (a) (b) |

crane lock releases when the cylinder is swung in and out.

To my notion, this crane lock feature makes this Triple-Lock the finest double-action revolver in existence. The one I have has a serial number of four figures. I have seen some of these guns with numbers well over 16,600, and am told that guns above number 16,600 have heat-treated cylinders. However, since the .44 Special case is designed for only 16,000 pounds pressure, and since the gun I have will stand all of that and more, the serial number makes little difference to me. The fellow that thinks he must use super loads had, of course, better get the modern arm, since it undoubtedly has better steel in the cylinders.

I have never been able to learn why this fine old gun was discontinued, but would guess that the newer Military model simplified manufacturing and reduced cost of production. I think that a gun made of modern steel, with the indispensable crane lock, would be welcomed by many shooters. I, personally, would like to see the Triple-Lock in .38-44, .357, .401, and .44 Special calibers—the .401 using a revised and commercially manufactured version of my .401 Special cartridge. I am sure that the .401 can be made to exceed my own development; and, as is, it is the most powerful load I have ever seen.

This brings up the subject of loads. Below, and on the opposite page, are charts showing the results of penetration and accuracy tests made with a score or more of loads in the .44 Special Triple-Lock.

In building handgun loads it should be remembered that some cartridge cases are thinner than others as to material, some are shorter, etc. Most any of them will do for reduced or normal loads, but for the heavies the best are none too good. The .44 Special RA, non-cannelured case is my choice. It is

longer than the smokeless cannelured case, is of excellent quality, and has given the most loadings before the primer pockets expand so as to render them useless for further service.

The .44 Special cases that I have used outlast by a good margin either the .45 Colt Long, .38-40, or .44-40 WRA. The .45 is better than the .38-40 or .44-40, both of which are very thin. The .38-40 in particular is sensitive to load.

I prefer to use a primer of the same make as the cases. With the case above, the RA 2½ primer is the choice. They seem to be tougher and have a lower pocket pressure, yet they perform with high efficiency. They should always be the NMNC type and should be seated to full depth into the case. They should be started level to insure perfect results.

Many good bullet designs are available. If fixed sights are used, a bullet must be selected that will fit the arm. Target sights can be adjusted to suit almost any weight or type bullet. For hunting purposes a bullet should be flat pointed. For certain types of hunting, the solid bullet is best, while for woodchucks the bullet should be of the hollow-point type. These bullets disintegrate and cause tissue destruction and shock not possible with the solid variety.

After trying all types, I have chosen the number 429421 (Keith) with a large taper cavity for maximum loads of Unique when used in Colt guns, and the smaller straight cavity for heavy loads of No. 2400. With sufficient velocity, the smaller cavity will expand well and furnishes more material to disintegrate, but the taper cavity is best with the lower velocity up to 20,000 pounds pressures. The Boser No. 429454 is preferred in the Smith & Wesson guns and gives excellent results on game. The Bond No. 429770 was tried in hollow point with heavy loads, but, due to its narrow

POWDER CHARGE	BULLET NUMBER	SIZE	GROUP SIZE		POWDER CHARGE	BULLET NUMBER	SIZE	GROUP SIZE	
			H	V				H	V
5.0 gr. B.E.	Ideal #429454	.430"	2-7/8"	1-1/8"	17.0 "	#4759	"	7/8	1-1/4 **
6.0 " #6	" "	"	3/4	1-3/4	5.8 " #6	" "	"	7/8	1.0 **
8.5 " Unique	" "	"	1.0	2-7/8	6.2 " "	" "	"	1.0	1-1/2 **
7.2 " #5	" "	"	3/4	1-5/8	5.2 " "	" "	"	1-1/4	1.0
4.5 " B.E.	" "	"	1-3/4	1-3/4	6.0 " "	Ideal #429336	"	1-3/4	1-7/8 **
4.5 " "	Bond-C#429655	.4305"	1-3/4	1-3/4 **	7.0 " #5	" "	"	1-1/2	1.0 **
3.5 " "	Boser #1 GL	.431	7/8	7/8 *	5.4 " B.E.	" "	"	1-7/8	1-1/2 **
5.3 " #6	" #2 "	"	1-1/4	1.0	4.9 " "	" #429421	"	1-1/2	1-1/4
6.5 " #5	" #3 "	"	1-5/8	1-1/2 **	4.9 " "	" "	.431	1.0	7/8
8.0 " Unique	" #3 "Hpt.	"	1-1/4	1-1/2	6.3 " #6	B&M #429240	.429	1-1/4	1.0
9.0 " "	" #2 " "	"	1-1/4	1.0 *	5.2 " B.E.	" "	.4305	1.0	7/8
8.5 " Unique	Bond #429770	.429	1-7/8	1-3/4 *	6.8 " #5	Ideal #429251	.431	1-5/8	1-1/2
7.5 " #5	" "	"	1-1/4	1-7/8	5.0 " B.E.	" "	"	7/8	1.0
6.0 " "	" "	"	3/4	1-1/8	8.0 " #5	B&M #429205	"	1-1/2	1-7/8 *
4.5 " B.E.	" "	"	5/8	1-5/8	5.0 " B.E.	" "	"	1-1/4	1-1/2 *
7.0 " #5	" "	"	1-1/4	2.0	6.2 " #6	Bond-A#429750	.4305	1-1/4	1.0 **
11.0 " #80	" "	"	5/8	1-1/2	7.0 " #5	" "	"	1.0	1-1/4 **

All tests were made from a two-arm rest, at fifteen yards. Results are averages of five targets. The first figure under "Group Size" is horizontal measurement of group, second figure is vertical measurement. A single asterisk (\*) indicates a low group; double asterisks (\*\*) indicate

a high group. At long ranges (100 and 200 yards) the Bond-A Number 429750 with 6.2-grain load of Number 6 shot the best groups of all bullets tested. Bullets weighing from 225 to 240 grains give best results in the Triple-Lock. Boser prefers 225-grain bullets for use in S&W guns.



point, was not satisfactory. It is highly accurate for target work, as is the No. 429336, which also proved not so good for hunting. A good crimp groove is necessary with the Unique, No. 80, No. 4759, or No. 2400; otherwise good combustion is impossible. Crimping over the shoulder is possible but

A grease wad at the base eliminates all leading possibilities even better than the standard grooved bullet, and it is little trouble to apply these wads. The three bullets of this type are still in the experimental stage, but have worked well in hollow point or solid, both on targets and on game.

The shooter should select a bullet and then stick to it, once it is found to work satisfactorily. A bullet measuring groove diameter or up to .002" over groove diameter will prove very satisfactory depending on the cylinder bullet throat. At least .001" should be allowed for free fit of the bullet to the cylinder throat. On the Triple-Lock Smith & Wesson, in which the cylinder is .432" and the groove diameter is .431", the bullet should be sized to .431". This refers to the larger calibers; the .38 Special should be held to groove diameter or not over .001" over groove diameter.

Loading the .44 Special is as easy as loading the .38. It is just right for smokeless powder. Tools are very accurately made, as are barrels and cylinders; more generally so than in any other large caliber. The factory loads are not as powerful as the .45-38 or .44 Winchester calibers, but when handloaded the .44 Special has excellent possibilities. Its bullets, long and heavy in proportion to its caliber, carry up better than the .45 or the Winchester calibers.

Hollow-point cavities run from 1/8" to 3/16" in the .44 taper and straight types. The big 260-grain grooveless bullet weighs 235 grains when used with the 3/16" cavity, and has an over-all length of 1.582", the longest I have ever loaded. It kills well on chucks, but not as well as the No. 429454 5/32" straight cavity. In Colt guns, I like the Keith taper cavity 230-grain and the No. 429336 solid for target work. In Smith & Wesson guns, I prefer the 454 hollow point for game, and the Bond-Ness and the 454 solid for target.

In more than thirty years of hunting with the handgun, I have killed over 8,000 animals. After using the Triple-Lock, my conclusions are that it and the .44 Special cartridge are tops over any other commercial caliber and load. The .401 is more powerful but is not a commercial outfit.

BULLET	WEIGHT	CHARGE	POWDER	NO. BOARDS PENETRATED	CHARGE	POWDER	NO. BOARDS PENETRATED
B&W #429105	205 Gr.	9.7 gr.	Unique	8-1/2	6.0 gr.	#5	7-1/2
Ideal #423251	253 "	8.0 "	"	8-3/4	7.0 "	#5	6-1/2
" "	" "	6.0 "	#6	7-1/2	5.1 "	B.E.	6-1/2
" #429421	250 "	7.9 "	Unique	6	7.0 "	#5	5
" "	" "	4.9 "	B.E.	4-3/4	5.0 "	#6	4-1/2
" #429336	" "	6.5 "	Unique	7	7.0 "	#5	5-1/4
" "	" "	6.0 "	#6	5-3/4	5.4 "	B.E.	5-1/4
Bond-A #429750	240 "	9.0 "	Unique	8-1/2	7.0 "	#5	7-3/4
" "	" "	6.3 "	#6	7-1/2	5.5 "	B.E.	7-1/4
Bond-C #429655	246 "	5.8 "	#6	4-1/2	6.5 "	#5	4
Bond-D #429770	230 "	17.0 "	#4759	8	7.0 "	#5	6-1/2
" "	" "	11.0 "	#80	7	6.5 "	Unique	8
" "	" "	6.0 "	#6	7	5.4 "	B.E.	5-3/4
Boser Exp.F.Pt.	225 "	9.0 "	Unique	7-1/2	7.5 "	#5	6
" #429454	241 "	8.5 "	"	6-1/2	7.2 "	#5	5-3/4
" "	" "	11.0 "	#80	5-3/4	16.5 "	#4759	6
" "	" "	6.2 "	#6	5-3/4	5.5 "	B.E.	5-1/2
" #429227	227 "	9.0 "	Unique	7-3/4	7.5 "	#5	6
" "	" "	6.5 "	#6	6-1/2	5.3 "	B.E.	5-3/4

Penetration tests in very dry seasoned hemlock boards 7/8" thick, spaced two inches apart. (Bullet temper is unknown)

reduces the powder space which would increase the pressure or reduce the powder charge at the same pressure.

I tried grooveless bullets, hoping to reduce distortion of the body of the bullet by eliminating the burrs left by the rifling on the sides of the body. These grooveless bullets have only the clean, sharp marks of the rifling and they work very well.

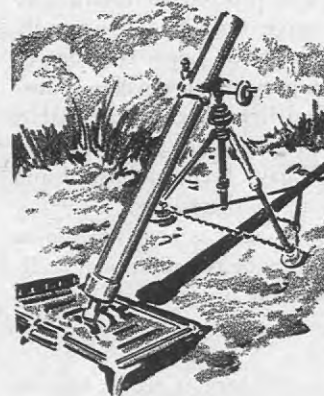
## "Sniper!"

(Continued from page 7)

and their eyes. Jap snipers seldom got off more than one shot. I have seen Marine marksmen deliberately unmask a Jap sniper by calmly shooting away the leaves that hid him and then drilling him through the nose. If you remember Japanese noses, you will admit that is good shooting!

The Jap is tricky but we learn tricks, too, to use against him. Maybe it was one of our billiard players who first figured out how to use ricochets against them. At first, any bullet that gets inside a rock cave is dangerous until it stops bouncing. Even then it's apt to be pretty hot. But our ricochets were not all accidents. Some of our marksmen, having figured out just where a sniper had to be, figured out a spot where a steel-jacketed bullet could be banked off a rock wall against the sniper's otherwise invulnerable neck. It worked, on many occasions, to the fatal embarrassment of many Japs.

I've already said that I like the Springfield. I like the carbine, too. I don't know the M1 very well. I do remember, though, how it was introduced by the Army in the Solomons just before I left there to return home. The doughboys took the guns up front, did enough firing to use up five cartridges all around, and then some of them, previously coached, began yelling, "Bring up ammunition! I'm out of cartridges!"



The Japs must have thought those soldiers had come up there with Springfield rifles and just one clip of cartridges. Anyway, they came boiling out and got mowed down by the Garands. Well, I like anything that kills Japs, so I guess that makes me a friend of the Garand.