

Smith & Wesson Model 39

about 1,000 steel frames. In 1966, S&W decided to complete those frames, and 927 of them were incorporated into production. Three serial number ranges were used for these, the first in the 35,000 – 39,000 range, the second in the 60,000 – 64,000 range, and the last in the 81,000 – 82,000 range. If you have one of these, it's a desirable collector item, and

Marksmanship unit. The 39-1 (never so marked) is today properly referred to as the Model 52-A. These were produced circa 1961 – 1964.

A number of police agencies adopted the Model 39, and some reports had come in complaining about broken extractors on pistols used extensively. S&W improved the extractor from a wide spring bar to a narrower extractor powered by a coil spring. That engineering change resulted in the Model 39-2. No other changes were made throughout the production life of the Model 39. The Model 39 was easily adaptable with a wider frame and a staggered-round magazine to a 14-shot model. S&W made some prototypes, and a few were sent to the Navy at the Navy's request. The sound-suppressed "Hush Puppy" pistols of Vietnam fame generated from these.

The 14-shot pistol was formalized as a production item and released on June 8, 1971 as the Model 59.

These guns became the first "wonderines." Less than 100 of the first production guns had smooth front and back grip straps. A few had serrated backstraps, and subsequent production had both front and backstraps serrated. The 59s with these early features are now collector items. Model 39 and 59 pistols were widely used as police guns. Interestingly, the Model 39 and 59 slide and barrel assemblies will interchange, as the only differences are in the frames and magazines.

The last 39-2 pistol was shipped February 15, 1983, with serial number A47148. The 39 was superseded in the S&W line by the "second generation" Model 439 which had a few internal changes and a rear sight assembly with protective "ears." The Model 39-2 pistol illustrated for this article was made in 1980 and is accompanied by an original box, papers, cleaning rod and sight adjustment screwdriver.

The Model 39 was the forerunner of the entire Smith & Wesson full-size pistol line.

It was the starting point in the evolution of most of S&W's popular pistols. Even today, no other pistol in the Smith & Wesson lineup fits as well in the hand. It feels "just right" for the majority of shooters and is a reliable self-defense pistol. It has every claim to being a genuine classic.



should be authenticated by requesting a factory letter on it. Some now-scarce detachable dust covers were made for the Model 39.

The Model 39-1 was the progenitor of the later Model 52 "Master" .38 Special wadcutter target pistol, and it chambered the .38 AMU cartridge. This round was essentially a rimless .38 Special wadcutter made especially for the U.S. Army