

Next to caliber and choice of gun, the most important equipment decision to make is which sight system is best for your preferred hunting. Handgun hunters use two basic types of sights: "open" iron sights or optics (optics can be scopes or red dots). It is important that your sight system is adjustable. You must have some way of "zeroing in" your handgun to hit your point of aim. Scopes are obviously adjustable, but the same is not true of all iron sights. Good iron sights for a handgun must be adjustable for both windage and elevation. While it is easier to pick up moving targets with iron sights, shooting at moving big game is not recommended, since it reduces your chance for a humane harvest.

Although a scope adds weight and bulk to your hunting handgun, it offers several advantages. The magnification and light-gathering ability of a scope means a clearer sight picture and more flexibility under low-light conditions. What a scope can't do is turn a handgun into a rifle. It will not extend the effective range of a handgun, but it can enable precise shot placement. All Smith & Wesson medium and large-frame revolvers with adjustable sights are drilled and tapped for scope mounts.



Proper sight picture — the six o'clock hold. Center front sight blade in rear notch, top of blade level with top or rear sight. Prior to the shot, focus on front blade and target area.



HUNTING HANDGUNS

Are You Ready for the Challenge?



THE OTHER GUN

Whether it's rabbits, squirrels, coyotes, whitetails, elk or bear, handguns have a place in the hunt. In fact, according to surveys done by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, handguns have become the fastest growing sector of the hunting sports. The reasons are simple. Handgun hunting offers sportsmen more challenge and requires more skill than any other modern firearm.

The challenge comes from the fact that the effective range of a handgun is much more limited than that of a rifle, demanding the hunter apply stalking expertise to get within range. This expertise includes: woodsmanship, good knowledge of the habits and travel patterns of game, good distance judgment and superior marksmanship. A handgun is a limited-range hunting tool that has the power to harvest game cleanly and humanely, but only with a well-placed shot.

THE KEY TO SUCCESS

If you feel confident in your abilities to stalk game to within effective handgun range, your success really comes down to one thing — the shot. The question is, how good do you need to be to hunt with a handgun? Answer: You must consistently be able to place your shots into an area the size of the "vital" zone of the animal you're hunting. The heart and lung area of the average whitetail deer is 12 inches, but you don't always have the optimum profile shot. If you can consistently place five out of six shots inside a six-inch circle at 50 yards, you're ready to hunt at 50 yards or less.

As with all types of hunting, correctly estimating distance is extremely important. Fifty yards is a long shot in heavy cover, but in open country the same 50 yards doesn't seem far at all. The truth is, 50 yards is still 50 yards, and whichever situation you find yourself in, you still need to make a precise shot. Practice is the key, but remember to always be sure of your target and what's beyond, too.

With a handgun, it is best to practice at various "estimated" distances, from both "off-hand" and rested positions. Next to shooting from a rest, gripping your gun hand with your free hand will give you a consistently steady grip. Remember, the best confidence builders are a good quality, accurate weapon, practice and total familiarity with your hunting handgun.

HANDGUN TYPES

The three basic types of handgun actions are: autoloaders, revolvers, and single shots. Since there is a wider selection of calibers available with single shots and revolvers, which are appropriate for both small and large game, they are used to a much greater extent for hunting. An exception would be an autoloader in .22 LR, which is appropriate for some small game and varmint hunting. Revolvers are popular for big game because they afford quick follow-up shots and are easily fitted with scopes.

Seasoned handgun hunters will tell you that there are two basic rules for selecting an effective hunting handgun: size of the game being hunted and game regulations. Which calibers and ammunition are acceptable for different species of game can be found by consulting your state game laws.



The new **500 Smith & Wesson Magnum** can deliver more than a ton and a quarter of muzzle energy. Its muscular and massive new X-frame weighs 72.5 oz. but is remarkably manageable, thanks to its recoil compensator.



S&W Model 22S Sport
Semi-Auto .22 LR
with 7" bbl



S&W Model 41
Semi-Auto .22 LR



The **Smith & Wesson 460XVR** is the highest velocity revolver in the world (2330 FPS/200 grain). Other features include: interchangeable compensator; gain twist rifled barrel for superb accuracy; and incredibly low perceived recoil for all loads.



The new **Smith & Wesson Model 629 Comped Hunter** is a six-shot .44 Magnum revolver with a full-length tapered barrel lug beneath a 7 1/2-inch ported and compensated barrel, rosewood laminate grips with finger grooves and adjustable sights.

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.357 Magnum® .41 Magnum® .44 Magnum®

If you are small-game or varmint hunting at close range, a .22 LR can be an excellent choice. When it comes to larger game, you need a gun powerful enough to make a humane kill. Cartridges like the .357, .41, .44, .460, and 500 Magnums® are the choices of experienced handgun hunters. They have the knock-down power needed for large-bodied animals and the effective range needed when hunting big game.

Power is no substitute for a poorly placed shot. Remember, no matter what the size of your bullet, it has to be placed in a vital area. Larger caliber handguns present a challenge. You must practice to control the recoil of a heavy caliber handgun, to ensure consistent accuracy and quick follow-up shots. Select a legal caliber that you can shoot accurately, at various distances, every time.