

Charter Arms



CHARTER FIREARMS UNDERCOVER AND OFF DUTY SPECS

	Undercover	Off Duty
Caliber	.38 Special	.38 Special
Barrel Length	2.00 in.	2.00 in.
Capacity	5	5
Action	Double Action Only	Hammerless Double Action Only
Weight	16 oz.	12 oz.
MSRP	\$345 US	\$375 US

I've been studying global markets and the U.S. economy in greater detail lately. We are importing goods of every type from every corner of the world and exporting comparatively very little outside Coke®, McDonald's®, Paris Hilton gossip, and really bad Hollywood movies. Quite a bit of our favorite guns are imports. SIG, HK, Glock, IMI, Walther, CZ... all imports... or at least all foreign-owned companies. Much like the auto industry, a lot of imports are now being manufactured here while U.S. companies are struggling or moving manufacturing out of country. HK and FNH both have large manufacturing operations here now. Look at Detonics. Remember the Detonics Combat Master I recently reviewed? I hailed it as excellent, and before the magazine hit the press they closed shop again. Look at Springfield Armory. A proud U.S. company, sure. But their XD pistol was designed and made in Croatia and their 1911s are built off frames made in Brazil. Remington's new line of Mauser type rifles (the 798s) are made in Serbia of all places. This is interesting because the only things I'm aware of Serbia ever exporting are refugees and ethnic cleansing.

If you want a U.S.A. made snubby for everyday concealment, where does that leave you? Just Ruger and S&W? Well, there is another one here. A notorious one. Charter Arms made a small, light little snubby that became famous because of a serial killer. It wasn't long after that incident that politicians denounced small,

inexpensive revolvers as "Saturday Night Specials" often referring to a Charter Arms gun specifically. This isn't the historic backdrop a gunmaker would want. Not like, say, Winchester, which uses American history as their logo: the icon of the cowboy racing on a horse with pistol in hand. Yet, Winchester's old New Haven Connecticut factory is shut down—a decision made by the foreign owners who also own Browning. The name Winchester is still around and merchandise is actually abundant. Too bad Winchester as a brand is now meaningless. Almost universally these days a Winchester-stamped item is total crap. Usually cheap Chinese made knock-offs of otherwise decent items like Gerber multi tools and Old Timer knives. Okay, I'll come back to the subject at hand: Charter Arms. The mighty has fallen and the meek has sent us a pair of new revolvers to test out.

I'm going to be perfectly honest and blunt here: When I first looked at these guns, I didn't like them one bit. I didn't like the way the grips don't even fit together. Two different models and neither one has a grip panel that matches the other. And they are not cheap either. Compared to the other American made

wheel guns, they are the cheapest, sure. However if you open it up to other gun makers, the dealer cost is greater than what my shop retails Brazilian made Rossi snubbies for. If we put them on the shelf it would sit there for the same price as a Taurus, and the Taurus has better fit and finish and a lifetime warranty. I honestly couldn't see why anyone would buy a Charter Arms. But when it sits next to a Smith & Wesson or a Ruger, it does so with a huge price advantage. Buying an American gun is something that is important to a lot of people these days and they wouldn't have a gun made in Brazil. This is where Charter Arms

Continued on page 16

The Concealment Shop
Shooting & Concealment Specialists



- ✓ Manufacturing Gun Purses
- ✓ Handbags, Attaches, Vests & Belts for Hangun Concealment
- ✓ Some Customizing Available

3550 E. Hwy 80
Mesquite, TX 75149
972-289-8997
800-444-7090
Fax: 972-289-4410

www.theconcealmentshop.com email: concealmentshop@msn.com



This is the Off Duty. Even in the small hands of Marie, she can only get two fingers on the grip. Charter is proud of the 3 point lock up to keep the cylinder closed. Unfortunately, the hammer drops before the cylinder actually rotates enough to lock up. This could cause a serious timing issue, something more critical than the cylinder falling open during recoil.

comes into play, and they will sell by the boxful.

I know I've been called a gun snob, and I would rather review a slick new Wilson Combat or a Walther. I like nice things and I'll make no apologies for that. I've also promised readers that I will be 100% honest with them. I'm not going to beat something up without pointing out any good points, and these two Charters do have some solid good points to them that make them worthy arms for concealed carry and self-defense. So let's get to it.

The first revolver is called the Undercover. It is a small, very light, 5-shot, double action only (DAO), .38 Special revolver that sports a spurless and snag free hammer. It's nothing more than that. It is what it is. The trigger pull is heavy, the grips are short, and most of your hand doesn't get to hold them. Since it is a DAO gun, you can't cock the hammer for a single action trigger pull because there isn't one. Overall, this is a rough little bugger. Much like an AK-47, what is at first perceived as short comings become strengths and even become endearing qualities. This gun is very small, smaller than the snub nosed S&W model 60 I reviewed. Shorter in grip than a Rossi, lighter than a Taurus. The only thing as small and light is a certain Smith & Wesson which has a much higher sticker price.

I wanted this gun to fail so I could report that. So I shot the hell out of it. I really did. Charter says these guns are +P rated, so that was what I used. I had

eight boxes of +P loads that I often use in my .357 Mag Ruger Vaquero for when I want to get my Cowboy on. I didn't have much in the way of standard loads, only a couple boxes of Winchester and Blazer. I shot it all up and the gun didn't fail me. It kept on chugging. Firing, extracting, locking, and firing just like it was made for the Soviet Military or something. Simple, unpolished, but effective in getting the job done.

I want to talk about the cartridge for a second. I think these Charters just might be the first .38 Specials I've reviewed for CCM. Most of us are well familiar with the mighty .357 Magnum. But the .357 is the steroid pumped son of the sagely .38. It's the same bullet, but the brass case is a bit shorter and it is loaded to lower pressures. Where the .357 is full of sound and fury with all due significance, the .38 is a much more pleasant cartridge to shoot. In fact, you can shoot it all day long without fatigue. The .38 might not be a hotrod, but it remains a favorite of detectives and bull's-eye shooters because of the reliability and accuracy that is inherent in the cartridge. A famous New York detective, Jim Cirillo used .38s through his colorful and powder-burnt career.

The other Charter I was sent is called the Off Duty. It is exactly the same as the Undercover, but it has a shrouded hammer like the S&W 460. The Off Duty is the one I like. Even loaded with 5 rounds of .38 Special hollow points, the Off Duty remains light enough to drop into a jacket pocket and stay there all day long. This is a good characteristic given the cooler weather we are having here in the fall as I write this. By the time you read this, it will probably be dead of winter and the weight of your CCW gun will be less of a concern than frost bite, frozen car batteries, and slipping



At first glance the Charters don't look bad at all. But upon closer examination, the poor fit of the grips are obvious. If it was just that, I'd say just get some aftermarket grips. Another gun magazine had recently said that Charter's fit and finish is on par with other production revolvers. In all honesty, it is the worst fit and finish I've ever seen.



This is what I got from the factory. Look close at the marks on the frame panel and how the trigger guard slid apart. I've never seen that in a firearm before, but I have seen it looking at cars that have been in collisions.

on ice. But autumn is all about cozy and comfortable. We are looking forward to pumpkin pies and wearing sweaters that only Bill Cosby would love, while sipping cups of sweet beverages that give off steam as you hold them to your lips. We can think of shoveling snow, jump-starting cars and black ice later. Right now, this is a pleasant, Norman Rockwell sort of time. For this time, the Charter Arms Off Duty is perfect.

Last week I had dropped the Off Duty into my wool-lined Moose Port jacket and totally forgot about it until I was searching for a movie ticket that I knew I had stashed someplace in all those pockets.

"Oh yeah, the Charter!" So why did I strap my .45 Commander to my hip, and the Guardian around my ankle? Because the Charter is so light and small that I forgot all about it all week. That, and I probably have way too many guns because I didn't count the ones locked in my vehicle, and the one I have with my laptop, and the, well, no. That's not too many. I mean, come on. I could have a sudden need for a .338 Ultra Mag. We do have Moose out here. Seriously. I have pictures.

Speaking of laptops, wouldn't it be cool to have an optical drive holster? Push a button and the laptop ejects a small pistol? Just thinking out loud. Back at the theater, I stood there in line for my "medium Diet Coke®," easy on the ice" that

costs as much as a box of shells. Casually waiting, and watching a big biker-type with a suspicious eye. If something happened and I needed to draw, the one gun I had on me that I could have gotten to the easiest without drawing attention to myself would have been the Charter Arms Off Duty.

Shooting the Charters isn't as bad as I thought they would be. Even for such lightweight guns, all the .38 Special loads I tried were not bad at all in the hand. I was expecting a sharper felt recoil. The trigger pulls on both guns were heavy and made accuracy a challenge. But in fairness, accuracy isn't really a requirement with these sorts of handguns. Going bang is.

Being a gun snob, I have a deep appreciation for aesthetic qualities and refinements such as mechanicals that work like the internals of a Swiss watch. I like that sort of thing. Now, I'm not seeing

those things with these Charters. This disappointed me, but maybe it wasn't the guns fault. Perhaps I was a victim of my own expectations. Looking at these guns without bias, they do exactly what they are made to do and they deliver the goods. These are not gun safe jewelry. They are made to be packed with you at all times. These guns are unadorned and unpretentious, just like life rafts. They are simple and they work. And when it comes right down to it, that is all that really matters in the end.

If you want a real American-made gun but don't have a lot of money, then Charter Arms has you covered.

George Hill is an NRA Certified Pistol and Personal Protection instructor and the writer and publisher of MadOgre.com. Visit his website for more information on Mad Ogre.

www.madogre.com
Photography by George.



**BE AWARE, BE PREPARED,
BE A USCAT.**

Visit our website
and activate your
membership today,
it's free!

www.unitedstatescat.us
info@unitedstatescat.us

USCAT, Keeping America Strong