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DAN WESSON IS BACK!

By John Taffin

Dan Wesson, great-grandson of Smith & Wesson co-founder D. B. Wesson, was born in Massachusetts in 1916. By 1938 he had joined the family company as a machine operator, and was named assistant superintendent in 1941.

In 1963 Dan Wesson was named plant superintendent of S&W, but trouble was immediately ahead. It came in 1966 with the acquisition of Smith & Wesson by Bangor Punta.

Dan Wesson tried to avoid the takeover by buying up shares of stock. When he failed, he resigned from the company.

Wesson had formed his own tool and die company in 1948. In 1968, after



leaving Bangor Punta's Smith & Wesson, Dan Wesson changed D.B. Wesson, Inc. to Dan Wesson Arms.

By 1969 the new Dan Wesson .357 Magnum was being shown and in 1970, the public was able to purchase the first .357 Magnum from a new company since

the Great Western and Ruger Blackhawk .357's of the mid-1950s.

Radical New Revolver

The radical new Dan Wesson offered the interchangeable barrel system. Dan Wesson abandoned the idea of a traditional barrel and instead provided a very skinny barrel that can be hand tightened and removed.

The barrel is screwed into the frame until it bears against a feeler gauge of .002" to .006", depending upon the caliber. Then a heavy shroud is placed over the barrel and a hole in the back of the shroud matches with an aligning pin on the frame.

A barrel nut is then screwed on the muzzle end of the barrel and, using a special wrench provided with each gun, is tightened against the shroud.

In addition to a barrel that was locked at the front of the muzzle, the Dan Wesson cylinder latch was located, not at the rear, but at the front of the cylinder. This contributed significantly to accuracy.

The first Dan Wesson .357s were quite homely with the barrel nut hanging seemingly in space on the end of the barrel.

Once that nut was concealed in the shroud—a heavy shroud was introduced giving the .357 Dan Wesson a Python-esque

look—the Wesson revolver became quite handsome.

Silhouette Supreme

More importantly, Dan Wesson soon brought out an eight-inch heavy-barreled version that became immediately popular

Wesson Firearms, formerly Dan Wesson Firearms, is alive and well and producing revolvers in Palmer, Mass. I recently made my way to the Maple Tree Industrial Center and found the small sign that led me to the second floor offices.

The firm survived the ownership of the company by non-family, but the reins are now back in the hands of the Wessons, Seth and Carol. Seth is the son of Dan Wesson and the third generation, 21-year-old Eric, works at the factory when home from college.

Arriving with my family at the Wesson plant at lunchtime, I discovered that my daughter, grand-daughters and I were to have a picnic lunch with all the crew at Wesson. We enjoyed turkey sandwiches, potato salad and all the fixings as we visited.

Then instead of sending my girls shopping while I toured the plant, Chief Engineer, Bob "Bubba" Talbott escorted my daughter and I through the factory located behind and below the office area, while my two young grand-daughters "helped" the company secretaries.

I know of no other company that I would have even thought of taking my family with me as I did on this leg of my trip through the revolver manufacturers of New England. Another example of the family feeling I receive from the Wessons. These are regular people to say the least.

For those who may not be familiar with Wesson Firearms, all Dan Wesson revolvers have barrels that are easily removed

and replaced with the use of a special barrel nut and wrench. Barrels are hand-threaded into the frame, the cylinder gap is set with a feeler gauge, the barrel shroud is slipped over the barrel, the barrel nut is installed and tightened.

Wesson Firearms are available in all the magnum calibers, plus .22 LR, .22 WRM, .32-20, .45 Colt and .357 SuperMag, .375 SuperMag, and .445 SuperMag. The latest Wessons are the compensated Alaskan Guide .445 revolver and the L'il Dan, a +P .38 Special.

While some firearms are made from investment castings and others from forgings and still others from machined bar stock, Wessons are a combination. Castings for the frame come from Pine Tree Castings and the cylinders, barrels and shrouds are machined in-house from bar stock.

Finished revolvers are available in both stainless steel and the highest polished blue finish in the industry.

I was able to shoot the L'il Dan on the basement test range of the Wesson factory. Without my shooting glasses, plus the added hindrance of shooting with a scratched sheet of plastic between my eyes and the sights, I was able to place three shots in the same hole in the extremely pleasant shooting .38 Special.

As with Colt and Smith & Wesson, Wesson has survived management that took the company backwards. Now that Wesson is back in family hands, the company is traveling in a positive direction once again.

★



Seth Wesson (left) and Paul Dembkowski fine-tune a new silhouette model at the NRA Nationals.

with silhouette shooters. I never even gave Wesson revolvers a second look until I watched a local shooter clean everyone's clock with his eight-inch Dan Wesson .357.

My 10.5" Ruger .44 Magnum was retired and I purchased a 10-inch heavy barreled Dan Wesson .357 Magnum for silhouetting. Using the RCBS cast bullet designed for the .35 Remington carbine, #35-200FN a 200 grain gas-checked long flat-point bullet, I won many a match in the early 1980s using the heavy bullet at 1,050 fps in .38 Special brass.

Dan Wesson Arms literally married itself to silhouetting and listened, quite intently, to silhouetters around the country. The responsive gunmaker gave us what we needed for competition.

Wesson Returns

By 1983, the Wesson family was out

HIGH PERFORMANCE HANDLOADS FOR THE DAN WESSON .32-20

Bullet	Powder	Velocity	Group
Lyman #311316GC (120 grains)	10.0 grs. #2400	1,202 fps	7/8"
	11.0 grs. #2400	1,240 fps	1 3/8"
	12.0 grs. #2400	1,295 fps	1 3/8"
	13.0 grs. #2400	1,401 fps	1 3/4"
	12.0 grs. H4227	1,015 fps	1 3/8"
	13.0 grs. H4227	1,169 fps	1"
	14.0 grs. H4227	1,261 fps	1"
	15.0 grs. H4227	1,366 fps	1 1/4"
	13.0 grs. AA#1680	868 fps	1 3/8"
RCBS #32-115FN (115 grains)	10.0 grs. #2400	1,167 fps	7/8"
	11.0 grs. #2400	1,208 fps	1 1/4"
	12.0 grs. #2400	1,269 fps	7/8"
	13.0 grs. #2400	1,441 fps	1 1/4"
	12.0 grs. H4227	1,066 fps	1 1/4"
	13.0 grs. H4227	1,151 fps	1 1/8"
	14.0 grs. H4227	1,260 fps	1 3/8"
	15.0 grs. H4227	1,347 fps	7/8"
	13.0 grs. AA#1680	851 fps	1"
NEI 100.313 KT (100 grains)	11.0 grs. #2400	1,306 fps	2"
	12.0 grs. #2400	1,407 fps	1 7/8"
	13.0 grs. #2400	1,539 fps	1 7/8"
	13.0 grs. H4227	1,236 fps	1 1/2"
	14.0 grs. H4227	1,306 fps	1 3/4"
	15.0 grs. H4227	1,391 fps	1 3/8"
NEI 135.312 GC (135 grains)	11.0 grs. AA#1680	756 fps	7/8"
	12.0 grs. AA#1680	841 fps	3/4"
	13.0 grs. AA#1680	912 fps	7/8"
	14.0 grs. AA#1680	1,004 fps	1"
Hornady 85 gr. XTP	11.0 grs. #2400	1,022 fps	1 1/4"
	12.0 grs. #2400	1,142 fps	1 1/2"
	13.0 grs. #2400	1,243 fps	7/8"
	14.0 grs. #2400	1,461 fps	1 1/8"
	13.0 grs. H4227	1,004 fps	1 1/2"
	14.0 grs. H4227	1,066 fps	1"
	15.0 grs. H4227	1,182 fps	1"

Barrel Length: 8" — Chronograph: Oehler Model 35P
Temperature: 45° — Group Size: 5 shots at 25 yards
Scope: Burris 3x



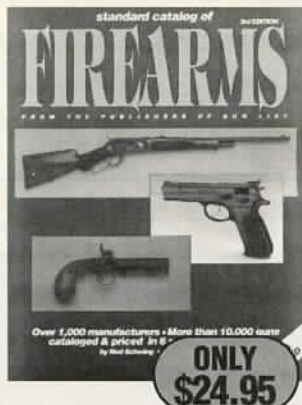
of the company and trouble was looming. Among other things that happened both outside and inside the Dan Wesson company, silhouetting took a downward turn. Sales of the Dan Wesson guns followed.

Things were looking pretty bleak and in fact we heard rumors of the doors already being closed on the manufacturing end of the company.

I don't know if you believe in miracles or omens, but in the darkest hour, suddenly, the Wesson family reappeared in the form of Carol and Seth Wesson. Seth is Dan Wesson's son.

And at the same time that they were completing negotiations for the Wessons to take over the company once again, they received a call from Hal Swiggett, then chairman of the Outstanding American Handgunner Awards Foundation, announcing that Dan

Continued on page 124



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WESSON IS BACK

Continued from page 65

would be posthumously inducted into OAHA's Hall of Fame. The family would receive one of the highly prized OAHA bronzes in honor of Dan Wesson's contributions to the handgunning world.

With both events happening on the same day, it certainly looked as if Someone was smiling down upon the Wessons.

The deal was soon completed. Dan Wesson Arms is now Wesson Firearms Co. The proud Dan Wesson name is now back in the Wesson family, and the Dan Wesson logo is once again appearing on quality sixguns.

Features And Options

As you read this, all calibers and finishes should be available that had previously been offered by Dan Wesson, namely beautifully blued (the best in the business) and weather-beating stainless finishes.

Calibers include .22 LR, .22 Magnum, .32 Magnum, .32-20, .38 Special, .357 Magnum, .41 Magnum, .44 Magnum, .45 Colt and the SuperMag series of .357, .375, and .445.

So, when the Wessons made it possible for shooters to have Dan Wesson sixguns again, I contacted Dave Michno, director of marketing and sales for Wesson Firearms, and requested a .32-20.

.32-20 Dan Wesson

The ancient .32-20 is a natural for the Dan Wesson medium-frame sixgun. First introduced in the Winchester levergun more than a century ago, it was also chambered in the Colt Single Action, the Colt Bisley, and in such slick handlin' little sixguns as the Colt Police Positive and the Smith & Wesson Military & Police.

Many of the modern .32-20's are actually .30-20's so they can use .30 caliber bullets, while the Dan Wesson .32-20 is a true .32-20.

Actually both the .30 and .32 designations are only approximations as the .30 caliber uses .308" bullets while the .32 is not .02" larger in diameter but only .003" larger using bullets of .311-.312" in diameter. Confusing, what?

The .32-20, while well into its second century, is an excellent cartridge for close range sixgun varminting and also IHMSA Field Pistol and NRA Hunter Pistol. It is difficult for me to conceive of any modern cartridge better suited to either of these uses than the .32-20.

The Dan Wesson stainless heavy barreled .32-20 weighs three pounds, four ounces (52 ozs.) in the eight-inch length. Sights are the excellent adjustable rear, but the front sight is a red ramp that can fortunately be replaced easily with a Dan

Wesson black post front sight.

The trigger is wide and the face is polished smooth. The single-action trigger pull is very good with no creep, but the double-action pull needs some attention.

For test-firing the Dan Wesson .32-20, a B-Square clamp-on mount was used with Weaver rings and a Burris 3x LER scope. The B-Square uses the ventilated rib of the Dan Wesson shroud for its security and has two vertical adjustment screws, one at each end of the mount for elevation adjustments.

It is quite easily installed in just a few minutes and I have used the same mount on numerous Dan Wesson revolvers over the years.

.32-20 Test Firing

My personal goal for any sixgun is to find a load (or loads) that will shoot into one-inch for five shots at 25 yards. Sometimes this is an impossible goal—some sixguns just won't do it!

Other times it becomes a matter of searching for that right bullet/powder/primer/brass combination.

And then there are the good times when it is easy. Such was the situation with the Dan Wesson .32-20. The worst groups were still under two inches!

So many combinations were found that were in the magic one-inch circle and under that it would be redundant to list them all again here. The chart of loads can speak for itself.

I was particularly pleased, however, to see how well Hercules #2400 still performs in the .32-20. Ten grains of #2400 and the 120 grain Lyman gas check bullet has long been a standard .32-20 load in Colt Single Actions and it performs superbly in the Dan Wesson.

Doing It Right

Dan Wesson is back and they're doing it right. Silhouetting is definitely back on the upswing again and that should help Wesson Firearms.

And if you are one who hunts big game with a handgun, take special notice of the big Wessons: the .45 Colt, .41 Magnum, .44 Magnum, and the .445 SuperMag. All of them are easily scoped with Burris bases and rings and some even come as Hunter Packages with an extra shroud complete with scope.

And especially if you want to shoot .44 Magnums but you are a little intimidated by recoil, the Dan Wesson .44 Magnum is as pleasant as it gets when firing the king of the big bores.

Yes, Dan Wessons are back—silhouetters and shooters everywhere can breathe a large sigh of relief.

Readers will want to note the new address of Wesson Firearms is Maple Tree Industrial Center, Rt. 20, Wilbraham Rd., Dept. AH, Palmer MA 01609. Phone (413) 267-4081.

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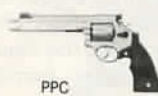
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