

The Judge Rules!

The Taurus Judge redefined the defensive handgun, delivering the devastating payload of a .410 shotgun shell out of a hand-held platform. Now there are 3"-chambered and light-weight models in the Judge family—one that may represent the most versatile revolver design since the Civil War LeMat.

BY WILEY CLAPP, Field Editor

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hen we first looked at the Taurus Judge revolver (August 2007, p. 50), it was the gun's novelty value that drew our attention. After all, you don't often see a revolver that fires .45 Colt and .410 shotgun shells interchangeably. That first article sparked a great deal of reader interest, as indicated by quite a lot of mail. When the story ran, there were not a lot of the guns on dealers' shelves, and the available specimens sold briskly. In the intervening months, Taurus has worked to remedy the shortages and made its catalog's promise of more model variations a reality. In the 2008 listing of models, there are eight different Judge revolvers. Half of them differ only by way of their blued steel construction, and I had none of those for evaluation. I was able to secure an original model, its lightweight counterpart and the newest gun in the line. I didn't have the long-barreled (6½") field revolver. The newest Judge revolver is one with an extra-length cylinder that accepts the longer 3" .410-bore shotshells.





The newest Taurus Judge revolver is also the most potent. This stainless steel model has an even longer cylinder and frame than the original to handle 3" .410-bore shotshells. It also sports a fiber-optic front sight and Taurus' simple, but effective, Ribber one-piece grip.

TAURUS JUDGE

MANUFACTURER: FORJAS TAURUS
S.S.; Av. So Forte, 511-Cx,
Postal 44, CEP 91, 360-000,
Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil

IMPORTER: TAURUS INT'L FIREARMS
(DEPT. AR), 16175 N.W. 49TH AVE.,
MIAMI, FL 33014; (800) 327-3776;
WWW.TAURUSUSA.COM

CALIBER: .45 COLT, .410-BORE

ACTION TYPE: DOUBLE-ACTION/
SINGLE-ACTION CENTER-FIRE REVOLVER

FRAME: STAINLESS STEEL

BARREL: 3"

RIFLING: SIX-GROOVE, 1:12", RH TWIST

CAPACITY: FIVE ROUNDS

SIGHTS: FIBER-OPTIC FRONT,
SQUARE-NOTCH REAR

TRIGGER PULL: DOUBLE-ACTION, 12 LBS.;
SINGLE-ACTION, 3 LBS.

OVERALL LENGTH: 9½"

WIDTH: 1.52"

HEIGHT: 5¼"

WEIGHT: 29 OZS. (37 OZS. FOR 3" CYLINDER,
22.4 OZS. FOR LIGHTWEIGHT.)

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: \$553

For those who aren't aware of the Judge and the surprising interest American shooters have shown in it, let's take a quick look at the basics. The Judge is a dimensional variation of Taurus' compact-frame revolver, a medium-size wheelgun with a cylinder of such diameter that it accepts five rounds of .45 Colt. The difference between the Judge and other conventional revolvers is in the length of the cylinder, which is extended to an overall length of 2.69" (3.19" in the 3" variant). Naturally, the frame is also extended to provide a window long enough for either of these super cylinders. The extra length permits use of .410-bore shotgun shells in that long cylinder.

A conventional revolver in all other respects, the Judge comes with fixed sights and double-

action/single-action lockwork. It is deliberately contrived to shoot shotgun shells, but its short (usually) 3" barrel is rifled to keep the gun from falling under the provisions of the National Firearms Act as a short-barreled shotgun. With .45 Colt ammunition, the Judge is a good short-range conventional revolver. With .410 shotshells, it becomes a host of different things. It can be a varmint gun for use on dangerous pests, a sporting gun with clay pigeons or other thrown targets, a small-game gun in survival situations and—probably most significantly—a defensive revolver with decisive terminal ballistics.

Consider the potential of the Judge in terms of what it will deliver. This chunky revolver fires the complete array of .45 Colt ammunition, which includes all

USE THE RIGHT AMMUNITION

As mentioned elsewhere in this story, the Judge has prompted a great deal of shooter interest and lots of mail. Shooters are obviously intrigued with the possibilities of such an ammo-versatile firearm. But there are also misconceptions about what will work in the Judge and what will not. I hope that we can straighten them out here. For one thing, the Judge is a cartridge revolver that is chambered for the .45 Colt cartridge. I found that I could also shoot the .45 S&W (Schofield) cartridge, which might be generally described as a short version of the .45 Colt. It works OK.

Several readers wrote to ask about using longer versions of the .45 Colt. Both the .454 Casull and the .460 S&W Mag. have the same diameter and rim dimensions as the .45 Colt and use bullets of the same diameter. Of course they won't fit in the Judge cylinder, because the chambers are machined to accept .45 Colts and nothing longer. To verify this, I tried to insert each cartridge in a Judge chamber and determined that the case stopped before it was all the way in. It is a situation just like trying to load a .357 Mag. into a .38 Spl. chamber. Further, you can't make either the .45 ACP or .45 Auto Rim work in a Judge.

The situation with two types of .410 shotgun shells is equally confusing. Ammunition makers load them in 2½" and 3" lengths. Most Judges take only the 2½" length, which holds less powder and shot than the longer 3". In both cases, the chambers are longer than the shell in order to allow room for the crimped-over front end of the shell to open to a greater overall length and still not exceed the length of the chamber.

As long as you stick to ammo that is correct for your Judge, things will work out. But I found that some kinds of 3" loads

will fit in the 2½" chambers, usually filling them from end to end. If I were to fire such a thing, the case would open into the barrel-cylinder gap and even into the rear end of the barrel. Clearing a jam of this magnitude would be time-consuming. Finally, the practice of shooting ammunition that is not correct for the gun is inherently dangerous and would immediately void the gun's warranty. You can use either of the two lengths of .410-bore shells in a gun chambered for the 3" shell. Simply stated, use the right ammunition.

—WILEY CLAPP, FIELD EDITOR



JUDGE 3" STAINLESS STEEL



JUDGE 2½" LIGHTWEIGHT

of the mild loads used in Cowboy Action competition and the somewhat hotter loads for modern revolvers. Although the company literature makes no mention of it, the Judge will also fire .45 Schofield (a.k.a. .45 S&W) ammunition, which is widely available for Cowboy match shooting.

The shallow rifling in the Judge's barrel will stabilize typical .45 Colt bullets, but not to the degree possible with other Taurus .45 Colt guns. You can stay on a Bianchi Cup silhouette at 25 yds., but the group is not tight. As a shotgun, the Judge will take the entire range of 2½" .410-bore shotshells. Shot sizes currently available include small stuff (Nos. 9, 8 and 7½), mediums (Nos. 6 and 4), 000 buckshot and even a rifled slug (1/4 oz.). The selection broadens considerably if your Judge is one of the new ones with a longer cylinder that takes 3" shells. This longer gun can take the 000 buckshot load with five pellets. A single 000 pellet measures approximately 0.36" and weighs 70 to 72 grs. In my view, this is the preferred load for defensive shooting.

The guns have a push-forward cylinder latch and a swing-out cylinder that opens to the left. There's a centrally mounted extractor rod with a star that engages the rims of the five cartridges in the chambers and lifts them free. Sights are likewise typical, with a square notch rear milled into the top of the frame and a fiber-optic front dovetailed into the barrel rib. The stubby barrel has a short underlug and a full-length sighting rib on top. A shooter can shoot with either the single-action trigger or the longer double-action—the Judge has both.

Since the gun has a primary role as a defensive revolver that might be carried on the person, Taurus put effort into minimizing the number of sharp edges and corners. This is very obvious in the cylinder latch, which is somewhat tear-drop shaped and nicely radiused on all sides. Acknowledging

VELOCITY & ENERGY RESULTS: .410-BORE SHOTSHELLS

	VEL. @ 12' (F.P.S.)	ENERGY (FT.-LBS.)
.410-BORE, 2½" SHOTSHELL		
WINCHESTER AA SPORTING CLAYS (No. 8)	832	338
WINCHESTER SUPER X (No. 7½)	760	282
REMINGTON (No. 6)	792	306
FEDERAL (No. 6)	712	248
WINCHESTER SUPER X (No. 4)	779	297
REXIO BUCKSHOT (00) (FOUR PELLETS)	738	266
WINCHESTER BUCKSHOT (000) (THREE PELLETS)	777	295
FEDERAL RIFLED SLUG, 1/4 OZ.	1125	318
.410-BORE, 3" SHOTSHELL		
FEDERAL GAME-SHOK (No. 4)	814	441
FEDERAL GAME-SHOK (No. 6)	821	449
WINCHESTER BUCKSHOT (000) (FIVE PELLETS)	808	508
VELOCITIES MEASURED WITH AN OEHLER MODEL 35P CHRONOGRAPH WITH SCREENS PLACED 12 FT. FROM THE MUZZLE. ALL 2½" LOADS FIRED WERE NOMINALLY A HALF-OUNCE OF SHOT, EXCEPT FOR THE TWO BUCKSHOT LOADS, WHICH WERE SLIGHTLY LESS. THE 3" LOADS USED 11/16 OZ. OF SHOT, EXCEPT FOR THE 000 BUCKSHOT.		

SHOOTING RESULTS (25 YDS.)

	VEL. @ 12' (F.P.S.)	ENERGY (FT.-LBS.)	GROUP SIZE IN INCHES		
			SMALLEST	LARGEST	AVERAGE
.45 COLT CARTRIDGE					
REMINGTON 225-GR. LSWC	778 Avg.	302	4.23	8.50	6.24
PRO LOAD 250-GR. RNFP	775 Avg.	334	3.56	6.79	4.42
AVERAGE EXTREME SPREAD:					5.33
.45 SCHOFIELD CARTRIDGE					
BLACK HILLS 200-GR. RNFP	629 Avg.	176	4.11	7.08	5.96
ACCURACY RESULTS BASED ON THE AVERAGE OF FIVE CONSECUTIVE, FIVE-SHOT GROUPS FIRED AT 25 YDS. FROM A BENCH REST. VELOCITIES MEASURED WITH AN OEHLER MODEL 35P CHRONOGRAPH WITH SCREENS PLACED 12 FT. FROM THE MUZZLE. TEMPERATURE 61° F. ABBREVIATIONS: LSWC (LEAD SEMI-WADCUTTER), RNFP (ROUND-NOSE FLAT-POINT).					



The latest development for Judge series revolvers comes in the form of Crimson Trace Corp.'s LG-375 LaserGrip, which also fits the Taurus Tracker line.

TAURUS JUDGE

the potential for sharp recoil, the maker equipped the gun with a one-piece rubber grip section with small horizontal ribs molded in. It has the catchy name of "Ribber."

I took the trio of Judge revolvers to the range with a supply of currently available commercial ammunition. Since the stainless steel Judge with 2½" cylinder was fired for a previous story, I shot it only briefly to verify my impressions already reported. The light-weight Judge, which also has a 2½" cylinder, has the same overall dimensions, but it is just about a half-pound lighter. This means that the gun produces recoil and muzzle rise that is noticeably greater, but still easily manageable. In view of the considerably greater ease in carrying the lighter gun, the greater trouble in shooting it is worth it. If you are going to carry one of these revolvers on your person, the light Judge is probably the way to go. The 3"-cylinder gun has so many terminal ballistic advantages that it quickly became my favorite.

A 3" weighs 37 ozs., which is just about the same as a M1911 .45 ACP pistol. That is no featherweight, but the gun performs very nicely indeed. Standard 3" .410 shells carry about 11/16 oz. of shot, as opposed to about 1/2 oz. in a 2½" shell. In the case of both No. 4 and No. 6 loads, the velocity was slightly higher, but the patterns were much more even. I fired both loads at what I believe to be a reasonable maximum distance for destroying dangerous pests—5 yds. In both cases, the Caldwell Orange Peel targets showed even distribution of pellets, with very few outside the 12" by 18" scoring rings.

In my view, the Judge's greatest utility comes as a defensive revolver. I thought that before the 3" version was available, and my opinion was reinforced with the availability of the longer gun. A long Judge will chamber a 000 load that delivers five pellets. At 70 grs., that would total 350 grs.



The Judge's long, swing-out cylinder releases with a forward push on the dish, checkered cylinder release. The hammer is equipped with the Taurus Security System, which is activated with an included key (inset).

of payload averaging 808 f.p.s. from the Judge's short snout. That equates to 508 ft.-lbs of energy. A single hit from a standard 230-gr. .45 ACP load is about 370 ft.-lbs. Also a centered hit from the five 000 pellets would impact over a larger area and produce five individual wound channels. I fired a series of four targets with this load at short combat distances (3,5,7 and 9 yds.) and got increasingly larger groups of about 3", 6", 7" and 12", respectively. Beyond 9 to 10 yds., the groups opened up abruptly, and I often lost one of more pellets off the silhouette laterally. At close range, a single centered hit from the Judge (with 000) would be devastating. For longer ranges, the revolver cylinder offers the interesting possibility of pattern loading. You might try the first three chambers with 000 buckshot and the last two with .45 Colt lead semi-wadcutter hollow-points in the event that a target appears at a greater range.

There is flexibility inherent in a revolver design and, in my estimation, the Judge is the most versatile combat revolver since the LeMat of the Civil War era. It's a load to carry and a handful to shoot, but the Judge is a powerful solution to the defense gun needs of many shooters.



The frame extension, containing the gun's coil mainspring, rests within the Judge's rubber one-piece grip.