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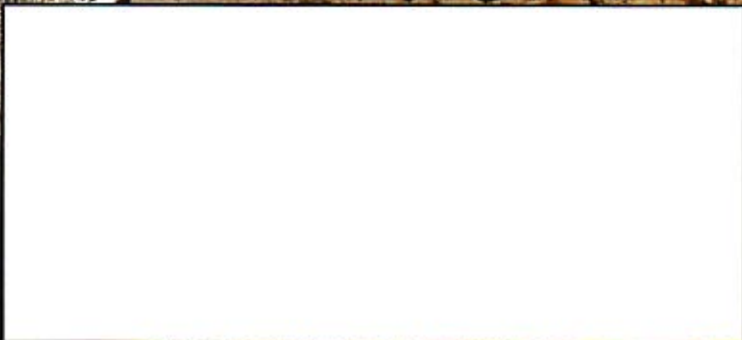
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TESTED

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Stoeger Double Defense





CHAD ADAMS

A contemporary spin on a favorite American classic, the Stoeger Double Defense easily fits the bill for those who are considering a home-defense shotgun.

Side-by-Side Security

I have a definite idea of what should be a side-by-side shotgun.

My Hunter Arms-manufactured 20-gauge L.C. Smith, though a well-worn field-grade model minus much of its original luster, is nevertheless a favorite. The Beretta Silver Hawk and the Winchester 21 immediately come to mind when I envision fine doubles.

So, a double take was my first reaction after opening the box of the Stoeger Double Defense. Solid black, short and ported, it is neither fine nor elegant in appearance. Covered from front to rear in Picatinny rail, it is at first glance an abhorrent take on the classic American double gun.

But then I began to think of the gun in context. The double gun, in this case a side-by-side, has a rightful place in the

history of personal security. Most will first think of its role as the coach gun in the American West. On both stagecoach and train, compact side-by-sides certainly filled the role for self-defense, being both handy in tight spaces and packing tremendous stopping power at close range.

However, the double gun for defense goes further than that. As long as Americans have carried smoothbores packed with shot in pursuit of game for the table, those same guns have leaned behind many a back door or hung above hearths, providing an ever-present tool to protect the homestead and its inhabitants from hostile natives, wild animals in rough country and any person who might do them harm.

To view the Stoeger Double Defense in the context of modern self-defense, it's fair to compare it to its contemporaries—the pump- and semi-automatic shotguns on the market today. We'll look at three major features: simplicity of use, firepower and compactness.

Arguably, the most popular and recommended arm of any type for home defense is the pump shotgun. Its simplicity and design, combined with the firepower it makes available, enables it to outshine the semi-auto in most estimations. But in terms of pure simplicity, the Double Defense compares favorably. It just doesn't get any simpler than a fixed-breech, break-open shotgun.

Put two shells in the gun, and close the action. Since the Double Defense's automatic safety engages when the gun is broken open, the firearm is already on safe when you close it. When pressed into

Continued on page 63



While sporting modern-day, self-defense accessories, at the heart of this system beats the rugged, lifesaving simplicity of a side-by-side coach gun.

action, simply push the tang-mounted safety forward with your thumb to make the gun ready to go. While most pump guns are just as simple on the first shot, they of course must be manually operated to fire a second shot. With a double, that second shot is available as quickly as the operator is capable of running the trigger. Advantage: Stoeger Double Defense.

Firepower is certainly important in a home-defense gun. Obviously, the pump and semi-auto easily outmatch any break-open gun in this regard. That said, slip-on-style shell holders enable you to increase any shotgun's on-board capacity. While not nearly as fast as having more rounds in a magazine tube, with training, you can become proficient at reloading and putting additional rounds downrange rather quickly. And unless you're battling the zombie hordes like Woody Harrelson, hopefully two rounds will always be enough to do the job. Nevertheless, advantage: Pump and semi-auto.

While the effectiveness of a shotgun makes it preferred for home defense, the overall length makes it extremely difficult to operate in tight spaces without adequate training. Overall length is something the U.S. military addressed long ago, evidenced by the collapsing stocks and shorter barrels on the current M4 platform. Like the house-to-house fighting soldiers and Marines face in Iraq, home defense means potentially operating in tight spaces.

At 36½ inches, the Stoeger Double Defense is 2 inches shorter than a Remington Model 870 Express Tactical and 3 inches shorter than a Mossberg 590A1 Special Purpose, a civilian version of the shotgun most used by the U.S. military. Because of the break-action design, the Stoeger features a 20-inch barrel, compared to the 18½-inch tubes on the Remington and Mossberg, yet it remains shorter in overall length. Weighing 6½-pounds, the Double Defense is nearly a pound lighter than each of these ubiquitous pump guns. Advantage: Stoeger Double Defense.


Despite its admirable characteristics, the Double Defense is unlikely to cut into Remington's and Mossberg's dominance in U.S. military, law-enforcement and

home-defense sales. Magazine capacity, multi-shot capability and a plethora of aftermarket accessories make these two industry stalwarts clear favorites for years to come. But for the civilian who wants the ultimate in rugged simplicity for home defense or even as a camp or truck gun, the Double Defense has a lot to offer.

Out of the box, the gun is ready for action and comes with a green fiber-optic sight that works well in low light. Each barrel features eight ports to reduce muzzle rise, making that second shot extremely rapid. A fixed, improved-cylinder choke should reliably work with virtually any load civilians might use for home defense, especially lead birdshot.

The Double Defense uses a single trigger rather than the double-trigger system common on traditional side-by-sides—a better choice for home-defense use. Of note is the tang-mounted safety that engages automatically. In my personal collection, there are shotguns that have safeties that engage automatically and others that do not. If an automatic safety is on your personal-defense shotgun, training is in order. It can be as simple as raising an unloaded gun and practicing the deliberate effort of disengaging the safety, but it's practice that can make a big difference.

The Double Defense is also fitted with two Picatinny rails. Where the barrels join is a rib, typical of many side-by-side designs. Mated to this rib, however, is a Picatinny rail perfect for mounting red-dot optics. Underneath, from the forward edge of the fore-arm to the end of the barrels, a second Picatinny rail is affixed, enabling the attachment of lights, lasers or other accessories.

Ultimately, the Stoeger Double Defense, available in 12 or 20 gauge, is a rugged shotgun with significant stopping power. Its simplicity of design and operation makes it suitable for those new to using a firearm for home defense. Yet, with attachment points for optics, lights and lasers, combined with its efficient balance of length and weight, this gun emerges as a contemporary counterpart to the gear and training available for today's armed citizen. 

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