

Snubby Maintenance

Armed Senior Citizen" - Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D.

Two inch barrel length revolvers are commonly known as "snub noses" or "snubbies" and are the least accurate of revolvers at distances over 21 feet. They are colloquially called "belly guns" because they are well suited for close-up work. They lend themselves to deep concealment. Given their favorable ratio of power to size, their rounded, pocketable shape, and their robust reliability, they may in fact be the ultimate concealed carry handgun.



Snubby revolvers vary in terms of having either exposed or internal hammers. Internal hammers lend themselves to not getting caught or snagged on clothing when drawn for personal defense. Thus, they are well suited for "deep cover" snubbies which can be carried in a pocket. Smith and Wesson, the world's premier manufacturer of quality revolvers, produces numerous models with exposed hammers (Chiefs Specials), protected or shrouded hammers (Bodyguard Models), and internal hammers (Centennial Models). After market customization work can also be done to remove the spur on the external hammer of a revolver. This is called bobbing the hammer.

Internal hammers are only double action as compared to the exposed hammers which can be operated in single or double action. "Shrouded hammers" (Smith & Wesson Bodyguards) have the same physical features as the revolver with an internal hammer the only difference being the hammer is only 95% covered (i.e., shrouded), thus, allowing both single and double action modes of operation.

Snubbies also vary in terms of weight. Lightweight revolvers naturally lend themselves to concealed carry. Smith and Wesson's 2 inch snub nose J-frame revolvers are either constructed from pure stainless or blued steel (heaviest in weight), aluminum alloy (Airweight), or titanium or scandium alloys (Airlites); the latter two being the most lightweight and the newest of Smith and Wesson's defensive revolver offerings.

These models come in the following calibers: .38 special, .357 magnum, and .32 H & R magnum. The cylinders for all of these models are chambered for 5 rounds (except the .32 magnum which is chambered for 6 rounds) and share the same quality construction and operation. S&W's attention to detail, responsiveness to the consumer, and warranty and customer service are unparalleled in the industry. Smith and Wesson is the summit of revolver quality on the planet. Smith and Wesson's catalog of revolvers and semi-automatic pistols is so extensive, you really owe it to yourself to visit their website and/or secure and study their catalogue to get a full perspective of their large product line (800-331-0852 <http://www.smith-wesson.com>).

What are the Components of a Revolver?

A revolver has four main component parts:

(1) The first component is the barrel which contains rifling on its interior surface; also known as the lands and grooves. They give the bullet (a.k.a., the projectile) spin, trajectory and accuracy as it is propelled out of the gun towards its target. The top front of the barrel is also the platform for the front sight used for aiming the revolver.

(2) The second main component is the frame. The barrel is threaded to the frame. The frame supports the internal mechanism (also called the "action") which encompasses the hammer, the firing pin, the trigger and the handle or grip. Integral to the frame is the trigger guard which surrounds the trigger and prevents outside forces from arbitrarily contacting the trigger. Also attached to the left side of the frame above the trigger is the cylinder release latch. This mechanism enables the operator to release the crane and cylinder to its loading or unloading position. Located on the rear of the frame's top strap in front of the hammer is the rear sight.

Supported within the frame are the third and fourth main components; the crane and the cylinder.

(3) The crane acts as a hinge for opening and closing the cylinder.

(4) The cylinder, situated between the barrel and firing pin, contains the chambers or "charge holes" which hold the ammunition, or "rounds". Cylinder capacities range anywhere in between 5 to 9 rounds depending on the revolver's caliber, although the most common capacities are 5 or 6 rounds.

Located within the cylinder are two components that aid in the operation of unloading. These are the ejection rod and the star. The ejection rod is attached to the star and is a spring loaded mechanism that when pushed rearward ejects the empty casings (i.e., spent shells) from the firearm.

How does a Revolver Work?

Most usually there are two basic modes of operation of revolvers; single action and double action. These terms refer to the actions of the firearm and not your actions as the shooter.

Single Action. When you pull a Chief's Special hammer manually to its rearmost position such that it locks in place, it is said to be "cocked" in single action mode. Visual inspection of the trigger indicates that it also has moved to a rearward position much closer to the frame indicating that it will take much less pressure to release the hammer, thus firing the weapon. This is commonly called a "hair trigger" because of the light pressure on the trigger needed for that action to occur. So, single action refers to the fact that once the hammer is cocked, the trigger performs one action; to release the hammer. Cocking the hammer is not recommended given the high likelihood of an unintentional discharge.

Double Action. Double action is the second basic mode of revolver operation. By pressing the trigger rearward, it simultaneously (1) cocks and (2) fires the weapon, hence the term "double action". That is, the hammer is cocked and released with one operation. This is the only mode of operation recommended for a defensive revolver.



How do I Clean my Revolver?

I recommend that you clean your defensive weapon regularly to make sure that it is clean and free of debris which can clog up the action. My motto is: Take care of your weapon and it will take care of you! Thus, you have to be able to field strip (read disassemble) your gun and not be intimidated by the prospect of doing so.

1. The first thing you do is set up your cleaning mat and paper towels. Set up your equipment to your strong side which means your dominant hand. Center your firearm on your mat and open the action (cylinder). Make sure the revolver is unloaded. Too many people have been shot while cleaning allegedly "unloaded" guns!
2. Proceed to dry brush each of the cylinder's chambers from the loading end one by one with your bore brush until you feel little to no resistance.
3. Invert your firearm so that the "business end" (or the muzzle) faces you and dry brush the barrel bore where you will have more resistance because of the lands and grooves.
4. That completed, hold your muzzle end at a 90 degree upright, insert your thumb nail inside the frame about one-half inch below the forcing cone end of the barrel (the forcing cone is the interior end of the barrel opposite the face of the cylinder) and using your thumb nail as a light reflector, look down the muzzle and inspect the barrel interior for any peripheral debris.
5. Now, depending on whether your firearm is made of stainless steel or is blued, take the appropriate tooth brush (a stainless or brass brush only for stainless and a nylon brush for blued) and brush down the face of the cylinder (the end opposite the forcing cone) to remove excessive carbon deposits or black carbon rings on the cylinder face.
6. As you now have the firearm with the cylinder open, the inside of the top strap (portion of the frame above the cylinder) and the recoil plate (which is opposite and to the rear of the cylinder loading area and where the firing pin protrudes) are now accessible. You can proceed to brush these areas with your toothbrush to remove the baked on carbon deposits from these areas as well. As you look at the recoil plate, you will see a rectangular opening or window. That's the window for the "hand". The hand is an internal lever that when the trigger is pulled in double action or the hammer is cocked in single action, engages a cutout on the star at the rear of the cylinder called the ratchet which revolves each of the chambers between the barrel and the

firing pin; ergo the terminology revolver. Now, take a Q-tip and lightly swab the exterior portion of this window without jamming it into the slot.

7. That being done, take your Q-tip to the ratchets attached to the top of the star (the star being the device at the rear of the cylinder that removes the empty shell casings when you are unloading) which is further exposed by the spring loaded ejection rod (which removes empty shell casings) when you press this rod rearward through the cylinder from the front. Once you have accomplished that, you then clean the underside of the ejection star and the inside face of the cylinder below it which is the star shaped seat for the ejection star.

8. Now we are ready to lubricate. Take one patch and center 2 drops of Break Free CLP (Cleaner Lubricant Protectant) on the patch. Fold it in half laterally like a bandanna--like you are going to hold up a 7 Eleven store--and insert it in the eyelet of the cleaning rod. Swab the chambers first through the loading end of the cylinder in a clockwise motion all the way through and all the way back. Using the same patch, from the crown (tip end) of the barrel (or muzzle end), swab the barrel clockwise in an out. Then remove the patch.

9. With the same patch, wipe down all of the surfaces that you previously cleaned with your toothbrush (i.e., the cylinder face and rear, the recoil plate, top strap, forcing cone), and then, once that is done, wipe down all the remaining exterior surfaces of the revolver. As you can probably tell by now, we are not changing oil at the neighborhood Jiffy Lube. So, less is better when using Break Free. It permeates the pores of the steel of your firearm with an active agent to prevent rust and material decay. You don't want to overdo it because excessive lubrication attracts dirt and debris and actually becomes muddy if you leave it unattended too long. As we approach the final few drops of Break Free in our firearm care and cleaning procedure, I hope that by this time you learn to associate care and cleaning with something that you like doing, such as listening to music or watching your favorite soap opera or ball game, thus insuring that cleaning your firearm never becomes a chore.

10. Looking laterally at your firearm laying on its side, notice that directly below the muzzle end of the barrel there is what is called the front bolt which secures the ejection rod into the revolver once it is closed. The front bolt is a spring loaded device that requires approx half a drop of lubricant twice annually. Holding the muzzle down to the mat with the gun vertical and the back strap facing up, put a half drop on the front bolt and depress it several times letting gravity do its work.

11. With the cylinder open looking at the ratchets on the star, directly in the center of the ratchets is the center pin. The center pin which is also spring loaded secures the cylinder into the recoil plate when the cylinder is closed. Twice annually put a half a drop on the center pin and depress it manually several times to accomplish its proper lubrication.

For the following 5 steps (12 -16), prepare yourself with a good flathead magnetic screwdriver and an ashtray for holding an expensive screw that you are going to remove and keep track of. These steps (12-16) should only be employed when you feel inhibited spin of the cylinder which is due to binding from dirt and debris. With repeated usage, any revolver's cylinder can either become retarded or totally bound up from the gun powder that attaches itself to the interior of the crane or yoke.

To correct this problem and free the cylinder from hindered movement, use a flat head screw driver and remove the screw directly over the top of the trigger. Place the screw in a secure spot where you can find it again (e.g., an old tuna fish can or ashtray). Once removed, the crane/yoke and cylinder can be pulled freely from the frame; just pull the yoke/crane assembly forward and out of the revolver in the direction of the muzzle. In some revolvers, such as the Smith and Wesson revolvers, the cylinder can be removed from the crane or yoke assembly. In other manufacturer's revolvers, such as Colts, those two components cannot be separated without a specialized tool.

12. Now, with a nylon toothbrush (as opposed to a stainless or even brass brush which can scratch and damage anything softer than stainless steel such as alloy revolvers and blued or black matte finish guns), brush the dirt off of the full circumference of the crane's top barrel. If you see any dirt or debris on the bottom barrel of course clean it off also.

13. Put two drops of Break Free on the top barrel of the crane and reassemble the crane and the cylinder. Now, treat the combination of the two components as a centrifuge machine, and spin the cylinder clockwise

letting gravity dispense and propel the Break Free to the interior walls of the cylinder cleaning the interior walls with the agitating action of the spinning. Remove the crane which is blackened by the dirt inside the cylinder and wipe the crane off with a rag or paper towel. Now put the two components back together again without adding additional Break Free and spin it some more. Take the crane out again and wipe it off again. Continue this process until the Break Free runs clearly onto your paper towel when you wipe the crane's top barrel with it, or when the cylinder runs extremely freely and unbound on its spinning axis; the crane. This repetitive procedure should take about 6 runs to thoroughly clean the cylinder interior.

14. Make sure to use some Break Free on the outer surface of the cylinder also to remove the exterior dirt (or at least your body salts from handling) if you have not already done so.

15. Reassemble the crane and cylinder. Do this by holding the bottom barrel of the crane at the 3 o'clock position adjacent to the cylinder and then gently place it back into the revolver's frame. Close the cylinder and then reinstall the appropriate screw that you removed earlier.

16. Finally, if you have an exposed, as opposed to internal, hammer on your revolver, with the cylinder open to make sure that the gun is unloaded and remains so, cock the hammer. That is accomplished by pushing the cylinder release latch rearward on the revolver (this is the same procedure for most revolvers with the exception of Rugers) and simultaneously cocking the hammer. This enables you to complete the following procedure without a tragic accident: With the hammer cocked, drop three drops of Break Free down inside the action, and while you hold the cylinder release lever rearward, manually dry fire the gun double action approximately 50 times.

With the springs and levers system internal to all revolvers, by pulling the trigger double action, it acts as if it were a washing machine agitator cleaning and scrubbing all the interior portions of the gun. Any dirt removed will come out in droplets through the window of the trigger. They won't be of sufficient quantity to cause any damage to your purse or holster--it's just 3 drops. If your revolver is dirty internally, these droplets will most usually be black. Should that be true, you may want to continue to dry fire until you see a clear droplet of Break Free at the top of your trigger.

We've now reached the revolver finale. You now have a safe, reliable and protected firearm to carry and depend on. Congratulations! It wasn't as difficult as you thought, was it? Once you have gone through these steps several times following our procedures, it will become automatic and second nature for you. You will be able to more readily enjoy that ball game, soap opera or piece of music while you are maintaining your equipment.

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Sources:

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