



A right view of the SIG-Hammerli P240 .38 SPL WC.

The SIG-Hammerli P240 .38 SPL WC

- Swiss-made Swiss precision

by Alek Wadi

Swiss-made Swiss precision is a term that certainly applies to the SIG-Hammerli P240 pistol, the result of a fruitful collaboration between Swiss firearms manufacturers SIG (Schweizerische Industrie Gesellschaft) and Hammerli.

Some history

Hammerli started as early as 1869, bringing out army rifle barrels and some of the world's finest target firearms. By 1950, Hammerli had entered the Olympic Games shooting arena by providing competition rifles and .22LR-calibre pistols for the Standard and Free Pistol events that earned winning scores for gold medals. SIG, since 1860, has been renowned for its quality military firearm production. Indeed, it developed and marketed the exceptionally accurate and expensive military P49 or civilian P210 self-loading pistol in 9mm and 7.65mm Luger from 1949.

The P240 saga started in 1971 when Olympic shooters convinced SIG that its P210 could be an excellent base for a target pistol chambered in .38 Special. The idea was also to challenge the Smith & Wesson Model 52 .38 Master and the

Colt 1911 National Match Gold Cup .38 Special, which were both excellent target pistols, but only chambered in .38 Special Wadcutter (SPL WC). So SIG, collaborating with Hammerli, started working on a P210 base that would comply with the International Shooting Union (ISU) rules for the Olympic centrefire match.

Following the release of the Walther GSP 32 (.32 S&W Long WC) in 1972, two years later the P240 .38 SPL WC was born and marketed. All P240 major parts were manufactured by SIG, but the barrel, final mounting, adjustments, testing and sale were with Hammerli. However, even before the .38 production started, SIG and Hammerli were already working on a .32 S&W Long WC and a .22LR kit that would be interchangeable with the .38 frame. There were some good reasons behind this.

The pistol

The P240 target pistol is based on the SIG P210 concept and manufacturing. It is a pistol strictly dedicated to shoot a .38 cartridge with a wadcutter projectile, all contained in a five-cartridge magazine. As with the P210, all parts

are machined out of solid steel, except the aluminium alloy trigger. The grip slant is 110 degrees (compared to 100 degrees on the P210), allowing for a better shooting stance with a locked wrist.

The standard grip is made of two quality walnut plates. Blank grips were available from Hammerli, as well as several commercial anatomic grip options. The frame is machined from 35mm steel plates. The 25mm-wide finished frame has two inverted rails, as with the P210, but these P240 rails are 200mm long, about 50mm longer than the P210. This enables precise, consistent and durable slide-barrel-to-frame alignment, which improves the accuracy.

The frame finish is a clean, polished dark blue. The slide itself is trapezoidal with a base 22mm wide and a top reduced to 10mm wide with an anti-glare serrated surface. All this gives quite a solid and military look to the elegant target pistol: nothing to add, nothing to remove.

The pistol, weighing 1150g empty, is manufactured with rigorous tolerances and tight operating clearances to avoid binding the mobile parts by dirt or thermal expansion. The Swiss

are renowned for their outstanding mechanical excellence, be it with watches, sewing machines or firearms.

Operation

The P240 is a single-action, self-loading, short recoil-operated pistol with a tipping and mechanically locked barrel. The barrel-slide locking/slide stop lever is similar to the one from the P210, but with a difference. The P210 barrel locks into ribs above the chamber engaging the corresponding grooves inside the roof of the slide. On the P240, however, the barrel locking mechanism is a simple rectangular lock that catches and sits in the roof of the ejection port above the chamber. It is a straightforward and cheaper manufacturing solution that is now evident on many modern self-loading handguns.

When the pistol is loaded, the rectangular lock engages the window into the roof of the ejection port, binding the barrel and the slide. When a cartridge is fired, the bullet leaves the barrel after 2mm recoil, driving the slide rearwards while the barrel remains in its firing axis an extra 1mm. The barrel then swings downwards, driven by the slide stop and cam slot, and unlocks from the slide. The barrel's rearwards shift is stopped by the frame. The slide continues moving to the rear, driven by the recoil energy, where it extracts and ejects the empty case, cocks the hammer and compresses the recoil spring.

The recoil completed, the slide returns forward, driven by the recoil spring, feeding a new cartridge in the chamber. Meanwhile, the cam slot and slide stop move the barrel upwards, locking into the window of the ejection port. A new firing cycle is ready.

The sights

The pistol's sight radius is 210mm long. It sits low (15mm) above the centre of the barrel and the hand (45mm). The steel front-sight is a target type with a negative angle and a serrated anti-glare base. It is 3.2mm wide, dovetail fixed, not interchangeable and factory adjusted. The all-steel micrometer rear-sight is integrated into a recess at the end of the slide and is fully adjustable for windage and elevation, with 10mm per click at 25m.



The rear of the slide is at an angle and has an anti-glare serration on 10mm below the sight blade. Those are interchangeable with a square notch of 3.0, 3.2 or 3.4mm wide. The sighting devices blend well in the general silhouette of the pistol and do not protrude like an odd add-on, as with the Smith & Wesson Master 52 and other centrefire pistols of the same era.

The trigger

The comfortable serrated trigger is 10mm wide and sits in a large 55x30mm triggerguard, preventing even the largest fingers interfering with the frame. The trigger is double-stage factory adjusted with nothing to change. It is clear and crisp.

The P240 trigger assembly holds the external serrated hammer, mainspring and stirrup, plus the ejector. Machined out of steel forgings, the assembly is fixed inside the frame and cannot be removed, as on the P49. Some trigger adjustments are possibly made by the shooter or preferably by a qualified gunsmith after removing the slide and grip plates. It allows adjusting the trigger pull weight from 1000 to 1360g (2.20 to 3lb).

Hammerli does not advise any adjustment on the trigger spring, and certainly not on the trigger bar engagement, which are both factory set. Some adjustment is possible on the hammer-sear engagement for a direct pull instead of a double-stage trigger. In any case, it is not advised that shooters change these three last settings for safety reasons. These are properly factory set for target shooting. Some cautious adjustment may be done through the back of the frame on the trigger stop for a shorter or longer backlash.

The barrel

The barrel is steel forged, machine tooled and flawlessly glazed on the inside. It is 150mm long, with a 14mm external diameter at the muzzle on 30mm and the 40mm long chamber, but is slender and reduced in the middle to an external diameter of 12.5mm on 80mm. This is likely to reduce its weight, but may have some bearing on the safety of the pistol.

Hammerli indicates that the land diameter is 8.70mm ± 0.05 mm (0.342" ± 0.002 ") and groove diameter of 8.95mm ± 0.05 mm (0.352" ± 0.002 "). The real calibre measured on a soft lead WC projectile forced into the barrel



is 9.035mm or close to 9.068mm (0.356")< indicating a very tight barrel. With a one in 500mm right twist, this barrel is designed to stabilise the .38 SPL WC lead bullets. No other projectile type should be used with this barrel.

In 1976, Hammerli marketed two specific blowback slides without mechanical locking, with specific magazines, recoil spring and rod, and a 150mm-long barrel, interchangeable with the .38 SPL WC slide using the same P240 frame. They are available in .22LR (one in 450mm twist) for standard-velocity cartridges and in .32 S&W Long WC (one in 400mm twist).

The P240 unlocking cam system is a strong kidney-shaped cut-out (or cam slot) located in the lug under the chamber with a superbly polished feeding ramp. Above the chamber is the rectangular barrel lock. The barrel-slide lock/slide stop lever linking the barrel and slide is inserted through a hole in the frame and into the cam slot.

To dismantle the P240, you have to remove the barrel-slide lock, which is done by first removing the magazine and checking that the pistol is safe with an empty chamber. With the right hand embracing the top of the slide, retract it by about 10mm. Insert the multitask Hammerli tool between the slide muzzle and the protruding recoil spring end. With this tool in place, relax the slide until the rear end is even with the frame. Extract the barrel-slide lock lever from the left, remove the special tool and push the ensemble 'slide-barrel-recoil spring and rod' forward out of the frame. Now you may separate the recoil



The five-cartridge P240 magazine shown with home-casted RCBS .38 SPL WC (ref 82030) bevel base and nose, resized .357 and lubed.



The P240 field-stripped. Note the slender barrel of the .38 SPL WC, the rectangular lock on top of the chamber and the special multitask tool.

spring and rod from the barrel lug and disconnect the barrel from the slide. This is enough to do a proper cleaning of the gun's parts and barrel and in fact, Hammerli does not advise any further dismantling of the P240.

Reassembly is done in reverse order without using the special tool. Note that the P240 has no slide bushing to guide the end of the barrel. Instead, there is only a precision-engineered slightly oval-shaped hole at the end of the slide that guides and enables the barrel to tilt during unlocking or dismantling. It is a simple and efficient process.

Safety mechanisms

Two active safety mechanisms block the trigger. The first is a manual thumb safety lever located on the left side of the frame. When it displays a white 'S' (safe), the trigger bar is disengaged from the trigger sear; hence, preventing shooting. When the red 'F' (fire) is visible, the pistol is ready to fire. The second mechanism is that when the slide is not fully in battery against the chamber face (even with a gap of 0.75mm), the trigger rod does not engage with the sear and shooting is not possible. An extra passive safety cocking notch

is located on the hammer, retaining it if released accidentally before it engages the principal notch.

It should be noted that the P240 slide closes after the last cartridge has been shot. This is contrary to the military P49 or early P210, which has the slide remaining open after the last shot or on an empty magazine.

Finally, and most important, there is no magazine-disconnect safety, so the P240 will discharge even without a magazine inserted. Shooters must therefore be well aware of the number of cartridges chambered and shot when using the P240. You may still have a live round chambered and a pistol ready to fire, even with the magazine removed, so check and recheck the chamber when you finish shooting.

The magazine and heel magazine release

The robust magazines are made of 0.8mm-thick steel plates, are unnumbered and have a longitudinal witness window to count your cartridges. The P240 magazine holds only five, single-stacked .38 SPL WC cartridges. A catch notch at the lower end of the window allows the

elevator to hold in the lower position, facilitating the introduction of cartridges. This notch can be carefully removed to let a sixth cartridge in the magazine for Field Pistol or Service Pistol competitions. If you do not know how to do it, don't do it, as you may ruin your expensive, hard-to-find P240 magazine.

The correct dimensions for the P240 magazine lips are 9.60mm (front) and 7.50mm (rear). The heel magazine release is identical to the one on the P210 and is a simple spring-loaded blade and catch located at the base of the grip, allowing a consistent magazine positioning and retention. The magazine extraction is facilitated by a finger rest on the front side of the magazine floorplate.

Markings

The right side of the slide bears the 'SIG HAMMERLI' logo and the 'P240' pistol model. The left side of the slide displays the '.38 SPL WC' calibre and the serial number starting with a 'P', indicating a non-military SIG firearm, followed by six digits.

On the left side of the frame, the 'SWISS



The micrometer rear-sight sits low in a recess, flush to the slide top. Note the serrated hammer, half-cocked.

MADE' logo and the serial number are clearly embossed. The left side of the barrel chamber is also marked 'SIG HAMMERLI', while the right side is marked with the six digits of the serial number and calibre.

Replacement calibres

Some readers may wonder why SIG-Hammerli soon replaced the P240 in .38 SPL WC with .32 S&W Long WC and .22LR calibres. Besides the fact that the smaller calibres are much more pleasant to fire than the .38, there was a serious safety reason behind this move. Soon after the P240 was marketed in .38 SPL WC, disturbing reports surfaced that the barrel may bulge when using both factory and reloaded Wadcutters ammunitions. As early as 1979, SIG-Hammerli wearily issued a warning to all shooters, advising to exclusively use Dynamit Nobel Ltd (GECO) factory .38 SPL WC ammunition with the manufacturing codes RV, SV, TV, KW and LW. All earlier GECO lots were not to be used.

SIG-Hammerli declined all responsibility when using other ammunition brands and reloaded ammunitions. The reason was that the extremely tight Hammerli .38-calibre barrel and thin barrel walls were made to attain the maximum target precision. Wadcutters commercial projectiles with a hollow base or oversized (above .357) for reloading were absolutely prescribed. SIG-Hammerli stipulates that this warning only applies to the .38 SPL WC calibre.

That was the end of the .38 SPL WC P240 pistol and production was discontinued in 1979. The only models that remained on the market were the P240 in .32 S&W Long WC and .22LR.



The results of the SIG-Hammerli P240 precision shooting at 25m.

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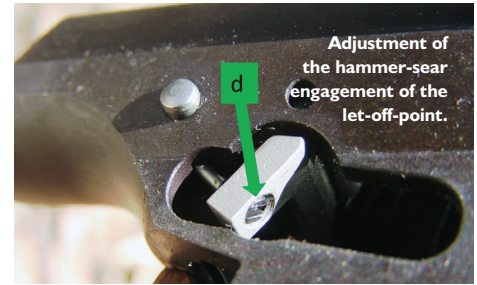
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At the range

Since 1982, I have been shooting my P240 .38 SPL WC with reloaded cartridges and home-cast wadcutter bullets. I use an RCBS mould (ref 82030) in 140-grain .38 WC lead bullet (bevel base) exclusively, with lube grooves and no crimp groove. Button-nose wadcutter projectiles may not sit properly in the magazine or lead to malfunction.

The alloy I use is from clip-on clean wheel-weight abundantly fluxed and with a final Brinell hardness about 12 to 14. I strictly resize all my bullets with an RCBS .357 die with RCBS green lube. For this particular bullet, I reload with a mild load varying from 3 to 3.45 grains of Winchester 231 powder in fully resized Winchester cases, checked for proper length and primed with Focchi or CCI 500 small pistol primers. I seat the flat-nose wadcutter bullet almost flush to the case mouth, rigorously and without any crimp. It requires some careful but necessary adjustment of the reloading tools so there is not the slightest bulge at the case mouth. It takes time, but this is essential.

At the range with this reloaded ammunition, the measured velocity is from 650 to 750fps (200 to 230mps) according to the powder charge. There is no need for faster velocity, as the precision obtained at 25m is good to excellent. The recoil is mild, thanks to the P240's weight, and the sights remain well in line, thanks to the slide and case ejection working flawlessly. There is no malfunction occurring, except at lower (circa 180mps) velocity.



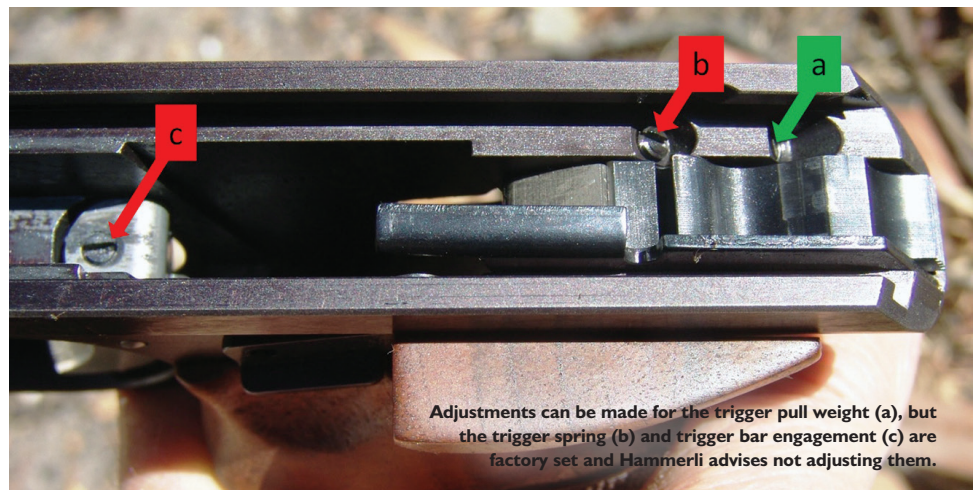
Adjustment of the hammer-sear engagement of the let-off-point.

Summary

While the price of a P240 .38-calibre pistol may be a deterrent for some buyers, it is well in line with other rare top-quality target pistols; that is, if you can still find any on the Australian used guns market. Battered secondhand .32-calibre models are often available on the European market for less than 1000 euros. The .22LR slides remain rare and expensive, and importation into Australia is arduous.

On the technical side, the pistol is heavy, but it sits well in hand - though, those with larger hands may find the grip more comfortable than those with smaller hands. Again on the technical side, due to the fussiness of the pistol, always use the right ammunitions and be sure to count your shots and check that the chamber is empty, as the slide remains closed after the last discharge as there is no magazine-disconnect safety.

Despite some of its peculiarities, the SIG-Hammerli P240 remains one of the most distinctive centrefire target pistols ever produced in Europe. Shooting with such an elegant, well-designed, top-quality and extremely accurate P240 self-loading pistol will always bring you extreme satisfaction. It certainly does for me. ■



Adjustments can be made for the trigger pull weight (a), but the trigger spring (b) and trigger bar engagement (c) are factory set and Hammerli advises not adjusting them.