

# INTRODUCING THE NEW DAN WESSON GUNS

By Mason Williams

This manufacturer  
will have a lot to  
offer—including a  
new double-action  
.357 Magnum revolver



Here you can see the Dan Wesson over/under with both its field and skeet barrels. Alongside it is the Model 49 side-by-side. The 49 in the picture is an early model; later versions will not have the cheekpiece.

In 1857, Daniel B. Wesson and his partner Horace Smith founded a handgun-manufacturing firm whose name has become synonymous with "revolver." Now, another Daniel Wesson, the great grandson of S&W's founder, is about to write another chapter in American firearms history. After many years of experience with Smith & Wesson, he has founded his own firm, with a plant at Monson, Mass.; in addition to marketing a line of double shotguns and air rifles, this brand new company will soon offer shooters a unique new high-quality double-action revolver.

I'll say more about the handgun later, but first let's take a look at the air rifles and shotguns, which are also highly interesting—and which are already being shipped to dealers. Instead of manufacturing all of these arms in the United States (where the cost of tooling up for such an operation can be fantastic), Dan Wesson has chosen to make only the revolver here and to import the shotguns and air rifles from the Brno Works

in Czechoslovakia. This Czech company is an enormous, very modern industrial complex which has long enjoyed a reputation for turning out high-quality military and sporting arms of all kinds.

The first gun I tried out was the Model 620 air rifle. This is a full-sized, .177 single-shot that sells at a modest \$19.95. It's a break-open model with a hooded-bead front sight and an open rear that is step-adjustable for elevation and can be set for windage by tapping it to one side or the other with a drift. The pistol-grip stock is made of densely grained beech wood and is uncheckered.

The factory states that the velocity of the .177 pellets fired from this gun is 540 fps. However, when I fired 10 shots through my Avtron chronograph, the average speed turned out to be higher—640 fps—which is really moving for an air rifle. After some experimentation with different brands of ammunition, I discovered that the Model 620 "likes" Hy-Score pellets best, and at 30



**Dan Wesson, the founder and president of the new arms firm, is shown here at his desk holding a Model 49 double. Before deciding to import these arms, he tested them exhaustively.**

feet, shooting from a rest, I got five-shot groups that averaged  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch—which leaves no room at all for complaint. The only thing I found to criticize was the gun's trigger, which could have been cleaner-breaking. However, Dan Wesson told me that a new and better trigger mechanism has already been designed, and is being incorporated into these air guns.

The second air rifle the firm offers is the Model 624, which is simply a scaled-down version of the 620. Ideal for young shooters, it sells for only \$14.95 and weighs a mere  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pounds. The specimen I tested turned in  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch, five-shot spreads at 30 feet . . . not as good as the 620, but not bad, either. Both of these air rifles are serially numbered and come with factory sighting-in targets. They're solid, no-nonsense arms that are great values, to say the least.

As I mentioned earlier, Dan Wesson Arms is also importing Brno-made shotguns, an over/under and a side-by-side. The over/under is the Model 201 in a field



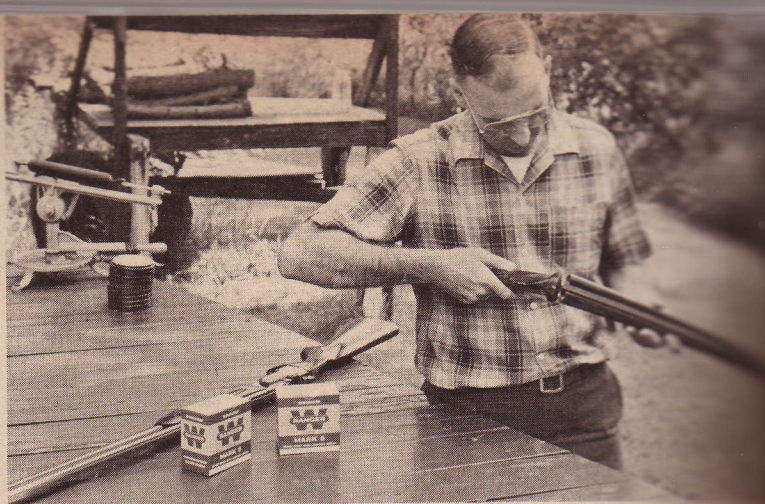
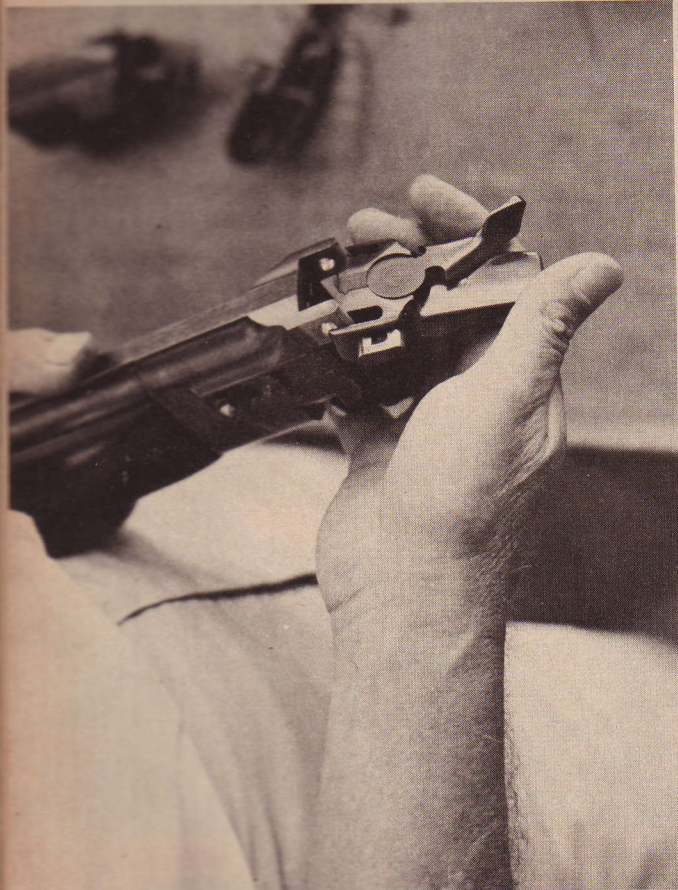
**Both the Model 201 and Model 49 shotguns were given a thorough workout on the patterning board. These arms are test-fired at the factory, and the results are marked on their cartons.**

version and 202 in skeet style. It comes in 12-gauge only, weighs seven pounds and costs \$199.95 (\$60 more if bought with interchangeable skeet and field barrels). The field barrels are 28 inches long and are choked modified and full, while the skeet barrels are two inches shorter, choked skeet and skeet, and featuring an integral muzzle brake. Both versions of the gun have a single bead on a solid rib.

Like the famous (but long discontinued) Remington Model 32 double and the fine German-made Kreighoff, the Dan Wesson 201 and 202 utilize a sliding breech-block that locks into the top side of the barrels when the gun is closed. It is a very, very rugged and extremely simple mechanism, as proved by the Remington and the Kreighoff, both of which are legendary in their ability to take the repeated pounding of clay-bird competition. The machining on this gun is superb, as is the fit of wood to metal. I don't know how this can be done at such a low price, but it is.

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This sliding breechblock is one of the strongest shotgun actions made, and is employed in a number of top-quality competition arms.



Above, Canadian shooter John Waterson is breaking the Model 49 double. This arm is a sidelock design, and is highly reminiscent of the fine Parker shotguns. At left, Waterson draws a bead on a waterfowl target with the Model 201 over/under, which proved to have fine handling qualities and threw consistent patterns.

Another unusual feature rests in the double triggers. The rear trigger will fire both barrels if you pull it twice, so what you have in effect is a double- and/or single-triggered gun—take your choice.

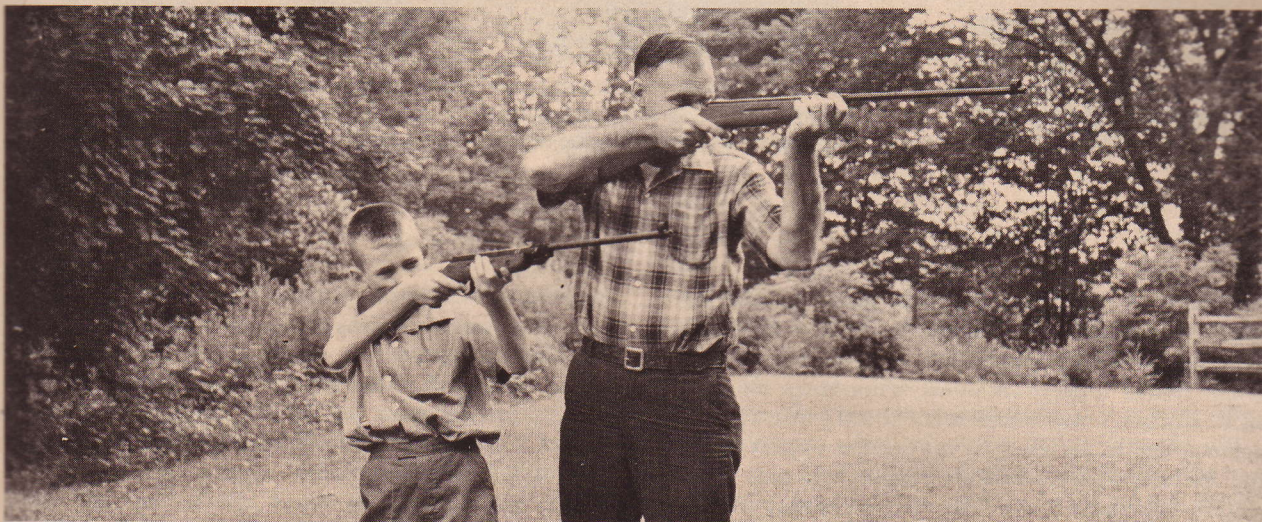
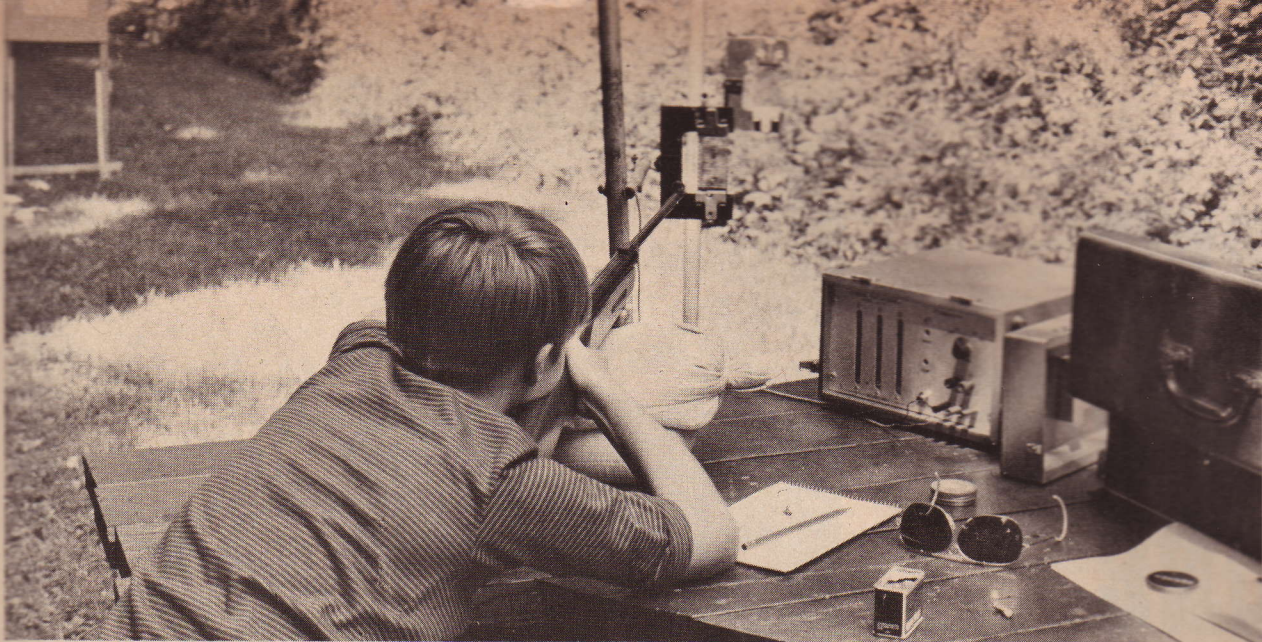
The safety is a pushbutton in the front of the trigger guard, a sort of streamlined version of the safety on the Garand service rifle. The stock is made of European walnut, and is enhanced by a generous amount of well executed hand-checkering.

The gun I selected for testing was taken from a stack of 201's in the Dan Wesson warehouse. Each of these guns is patterned at the factory (at 39 yards) and the results are written on the end of the shipping carton. According to the label, my gun had scored 76 percent from the top barrel and 73 from the bottom one. The skeet barrels in the set, patterned at 22 yards rather than 39, fired 68 percent and 72 percent.

While in the warehouse, I also took out a Model 49, Dan Wesson's side-by-side double. This is a conven-

tional sidelock gun that comes with extractors for \$169.95 or auto ejectors for \$30 more. It's offered in 12-gauge only, has 28-inch barrels choked modified and full and utilizes double triggers. The sight is a single bead on a solid rib, and the safety is located on the tang. You have a choice of a pistol-grip stock or an English-style straight grip. In either case, the stock is made of European walnut, and is nicely hand-checkered. This gun has an especially good feel to it, and is somewhat reminiscent of the fine Parker doubles that still bring pangs of longing to hardened scattergunners.

I was extremely fortunate in that my visit to the Dan Wesson factory in Monson, Mass., was a stopover on a trip to Canada. After I picked up the two smoothbores, I drove to the town of Granby, Quebec. There, at the Mawcook Shooting Club, I turned both guns over to Roger Leroux, the club's president and a good friend of mine. My instructions to Roger were simple: "Shoot 'em a lot."



At top, Jeff Williams runs a velocity check on the Model 620 air rifle, using an Avtron chronograph. It showed a very respectable 640 fps. Above, John Waterson and his son fire the Model 620 and 624 air rifle. The latter is a scaled-down version of the 620, and is designed for youngsters.

Which was done. Over the course of an entire weekend, the two guns were fired by men, women and children, using at least three brands of shells and three shot sizes. The guns were fired at trap and skeet targets, and at a patterning board. They were field-stripped and put back together again by several shooters. I would guess that they received about three years' wear in the course of that Saturday and Sunday. The verdict, from a number of highly experienced shooters who had been observing the guns, was unanimous: damn good.

But the biggest news at Dan Wesson will undoubtedly be a new handgun designed by the founder of the company and manufactured at the Monson, Mass., factory. This will be a high-quality double-action revolver in .357 Magnum (which means it will also take .38 Specials) and will bear a price tag comparable to competitive domestic arms.

The really intriguing part is that this gun will have several new and unique features—what they are is still

a company secret, but from the mystery surrounding the gun, they should be really unusual. The revolvers should be reaching dealers' shelves shortly after you read this, and I have no doubt they will prove to be a breath of fresh air in a field of firearms development that needs it. GUNS AND HUNTING will test and report on this gun as soon as it becomes available.

Dan Wesson Arms is off to a fine start. You'll want to get the new firm's small but impressive catalog at your dealer or by writing to Dan Wesson Arms, 293 S. Main St., Monson, Mass., 01057. The guns it offers are outstanding values, designed for the American shooter, and should find a welcome in a great many gun racks. This is not surprising for, as Dan Wesson himself says in the catalog, "I have spent over 30 years in the firearms business and represent the fourth generation of a gun-making family, so I do feel somewhat qualified to judge the qualities of a good gun." How's that for an understatement? □