Reviewed by Peter Caroline

Back in the late 1960s, a gun club friend of mine competed in a high-level pistol competition in Israel. There, he finished in second place to a Russian who was shooting an odd .22 caliber pistol. This five-shot semi-automatic featured a barrel placed at the bottom of the action...in effect, an upside-down pistol. Its unorthodox design effectively counteracted any recoil. My friend tried, with no success, to bring one of these guns into the U.S.A. Despite many entreaties to the State Department, there was no way this product of the Evil Empire could be legally imported. The gun was, as I recall, designed by a gentleman by the name of Mikhail Margolin. By traditional standards, it was aesthetically challenged, ugly even. To those who shot it in competition, it was beautiful. Mikhail Margolin never saw his creation; he was totally blind as the result of a war injury.

At the 2010 SHOT Show, I checked out a very unusual revolver, the Chiappa Rhino. And the Margolin pistol immediately came to mind. Unlike any other revolver I had ever seen, the Rhino fired from the bottom chamber of the cylinder, essentially in line with the thumb of my shooting hand! It was explained to me that this low barrel design shifts the impact of the recoil lower, in line with the forearm. This greatly reduces muzzle flip, and makes for faster and more accurate follow-up shots. Okay, this got my attention; when could I get one to try out? As it turned out, production models were not yet being imported. At the 2011 SHOT Show, I stopped by the Chiappa booth again and repeated my request. A couple of months later, a Rhino .357 Magnum with 2" barrel arrived at my door.

I have, in the past, fired conventional S&W, Colt and Dan Wesson .357 snubbies. To me, they are a great example of “carry a lot – shoot a little” guns. No real fun. I bought a 100-pack of Remington .357 Magnum semi-jacketed 125-grain hollowpoints, and dutifully went off to the range. Upon unpacking the Rhino from my gun bag, I heard several of my shooting compatriots politely inquire, “What the [bleep] is that?” I loaded six rounds into the cylinder, aimed at the target and fired. I won’t pretend that there was no recoil. A .357 Magnum is what it is, and the laws of physics still apply. The recoil, however, was straight back; I noticed virtually zero muzzle flip. I finished off the remaining five rounds with the same result. The soft rubbery one-piece grip, which initially looked tiny, fit my hand very well and absorbed a lot of the recoil. I recall that my initial impression was: This gun would be ideal for clearing a table full of bowling pins, very rapidly.