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Ahern Under the Gun

The Chicago Reload

By Jerry Ahern

Photos by Sharon Ahern

Two of the most practical handgun types to carry for general-purpose use are the full-size 1911 .45 and the no longer ubiquitous (not, however, obsolete) snubby .38. Indeed, depending on whether you hail from the Big Apple or the Windy City, this combination is the most common one constituting the “Chicago Reload” or the “New York Reload.” Ever since 9-11, almost all of us feel a special kinship with New York City that we never felt before. Sure, New York has its problems, including an anti-gun mayor who used to masquerade as a Republican, but it’s a fine city and, at least for Sharon and me, a great place to visit with terrific restaurants and all sorts of great sights. But, we were born in Chicago, as were our son and daughter and, wholly coincidentally, even our son’s wife and her parents. The guy who lived next store to my parents’ house was the chauffeur/bodyguard for one of the wealthiest men in Chicago. I hitched a ride with the neighbor once and that was how I was introduced to the Chicago Reload.

The neighbor carried a snubby .38 – a Smith & Wesson Model 36, I think – on body and a Colt Government Model in the rear of the passenger compartment, placed, presumably, so that he could reach back and get it or the principal could grab it himself, push come to shove. Before someone gets confused, no, there is no such thing as a Concealed Carry Permit in Illinois. That said, lots of folks carry guns. The ones who carry legally have a badge. This gentleman carried a Deputy Sheriff’s badge with one of the counties around the metropolitan Chicago area. That was the way that private, non-uniformed security could carry concealed weapons without running afoul of Illinois law.

Regular readers of my writings would likely know that when Detonics pistols were being made in Pendergrass, Georgia, before the company was sold and brought to Illinois, I ran it. Business affili-

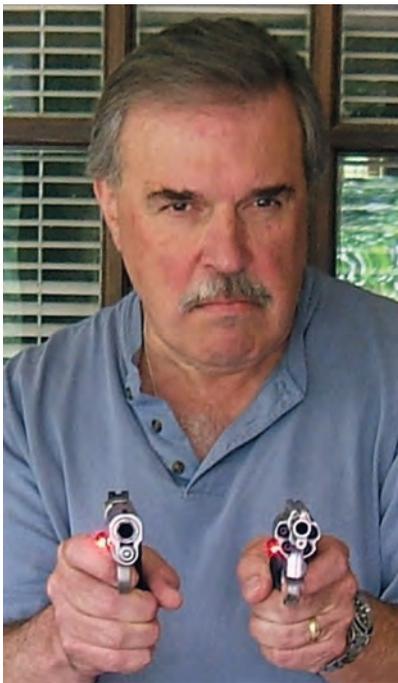
ation for that short period of time aside, I’ve been a great fan of the Detonics guns almost ever since their inception in the 1970s. The full-size (five-inch barrel) fixed sight Model 9-11-01 produced by Detonics USA was my conceptual brainchild and it’s not only one of my favorite guns, but that it worked out so wonderfully well – we had thirty-one thousand rounds run through one of them in five days without a mechanical malfunction – is something of which I will always be proud. And, it’s perfect for a Chicago Reload, all steel, so that, if the situation arose and you ran out of ammunition, you could smack somebody with it – it is not at all delicate, yet extremely accurate.

Often, the .38 would be the on-body gun and the .45 hidden in the car – as with my mom and dad’s neighbor – or a drawer or someplace, only taken out when things really got serious. The original Chicago-based episodes of the old television series “Crime Story,” which starred Dennis Farina, himself an ex-Chicago cop, were terrific entertainment and Farina’s Lieutenant with the “Major Crime Unit” did a great job of exemplifying the Chicago Reload concept. It was a good show.

The other vital component of the Chicago Reload, of course, besides the full-size .45, is that snubby .38. For my money, you couldn’t ask for a better snub-nose revolver than S&W’s Model 640. I’m referring, of course, to the 640 that’s no longer made, the .38 Special version of the Model 640. .357

Magnum chambering in a gun of that size, especially if it were lightened with titanium or scandium in the frame or other components, is something about which I’m wildly unenthusiastic.

How does the Chicago Reload really work? Well, there are two ways. First, whichever gun is carried as primary, of course, the second gun is the backup. Logic, these days, suggests the full-size .45 as the primary ordnance and the .38, hidden somewhere on body, as the backup gun. But, of course, in a day when handguns were actually shot with one hand much of the time rather than



Ahern with his Chicago Reload combination, both handguns fitted with Crimson Trace Lasergrips.