

# Reading the Tea Leaves of Change

## USPSA's Handgun Equipment Surveys

By ROBIN TAYLOR, USPSA STAFF

Every year USPSA hands out a questionnaire at nationals, polling the competitors to see what guns and gear they're using. That gives USPSA HQ a running snapshot of what the average competitor's kit looks like, so when a new shooter calls and asks "what's the best gun for Limited?" we can say "that's very much a personal choice, but 90 percent of the shooters at nationals used some form of high-capacity 1911, chambered in .40 S&W."



Ernest Langdon was one of many shooters bringing the hot new S&W M&P to Nationals. Curiously, Langdon brought one in .45 ACP.

This year we're seeing a number of curious changes in the data compared to the last four, particularly in Production Division.

### GUNS:

#### CZ, Smith & Wesson rising in Production

While Glock improved its dominant position in Production, the real changes happened with the lesser-known guns. In 2006 we saw a flush of Springfield XD's entering the field, but this year Springfield faded, giving way to a rising tide of CZ SP01s and Smith & Wesson M&Ps.



Para's Debbie Keehart brought an LDA-action 1911 to the Production contest this year, finishing second lady.

#### Glock Gaining Elsewhere, At Para's Expense

Glock holding the top spot in Production comes as no great surprise, but when we found Glock making minor-league gains in Limited and Open as well, that threw us. Blame it on a new wave of Glocksmiths like SJC Custom, but the plastic gun may be making something of a comeback — after all but disappearing from Limited once Production Division came along.

Equally curious is the fading of the Para-Ordnance frame. Where Glock has gained six percent in Limited since 2004, Para lost ten. In Open, Glocks

#### Limited:

FRAME	2007	2006	2005	2004
STI	64.68	61.24	57.20	58.13
SV	16.06	19.62	19.49	16.88
Para	8.26	10.05	13.98	18.13
Glock	7.34	5.74	2.97	1.88
CZ	1.38	0	0	1.88

Caliber	2007	2006	2005	2004
.40	96.79	98.09	96.61	95.63
9	2.75	0	1.27	1.25
.45	.46	1.91	2.12	2.50

Ammo	2007	2006	2005	2004
Handload	82.95	87.14	88.98	93.08
Commercial	17.05	12.86	11.02	6.92

Bullet	2007	2006	2005	2004
Montana Gold	39.29	30.29	38.74	41.43
Zero	19.64	29.14	27.23%	21.43
Precision	11.31	6.29	6.28%	9.29
Precision Delta	5.36	5.14		
Winchester	4.76	1.14	2.62	.71

Powder	2007	2006	2005	2004
Hodgdon	44.57	39.78	30.43%	40.69
VV	37.5	46.96	56.52%	41.38
Win	6.52	3.87	7.25%	9.66
All	4.35	2.21	1.45	.69
IMR	2.17	2.76	1.45	3.45

Holster	2007	2006	2005	2004
Rescomp	29.49	26.34	25.00%	16.25
Ghostholster	24.42	23.9	19.07%	19.38
Safariland	14.75	21.46	26.69%	34.38
Blade Tech	12.90	11.22	3.39%	2.50
Limcat	5.07	5.85	8.05%	7.5

#### Open:

FRAME	2007	2006	2005	2004
STI	66.96	65.79	55.79	62.5
SV	23.21	26.32	30.90	24.54
Caspian	4.91	3.51	4.29	7.67
EAA	1.34	.88	.86	.46
Glock	1.34	.88	.86	.46
Para Ordnance	.89	2.63	4.72	3.70

Caliber	2007	2006	2005	2004
38 Super Comp	41.78	47.62	47.21	40.74
38 Super	24.00	26.41	37.77	41.20
9 Major	20.00	17.75	3.43	6.48
9mm	4.00			
9 Super Comp	3.11	0	1.72	.93
38 TJ	2.67	2.6	2.58	3.24
9x21	2.67	2.6	1.72	1.85
9x23	1.33	1.73	2.15	3.70

Bullet	2007	2006	2005	2004
Montana Gold	45.45	35.21	44.71	45.89
Zero	31.10	39.91	30.29	21.26
Hornady	10.53	9.86	4.81	14.01
Armscor	4.78	2.82	1.92	2.90
Precision Delta	4.31	1.88		

Powder	2007	2006	2005	2004
VihtaVuori Oy	46.98	49.34	58.30	53.05
IMR	28.37	25.11	19.28	23.00
Hodgdon	10.70	9.25	6.28	7.98
Western	6.51	6.61	.90	2.35
Vectan	4.65	5.73	7.17	6.10

Holster	2007	2006	2005	2004
Ghost Holster	27.80	27.63	21.30	19.53
Rescomp	23.32	15.79	16.52	16.74
LimCat	19.28	20.18	24.78	24.65
Safariland	12.56	20.18	20.43	22.33
Guga Ribas	3.59	3.07		

#### Production:

FRAME	2007	2006	2005	2004
GLOCK	58.49%	55.12	56.84	65.52
CZ	13.21	8.66	5.26	5.17
S&W	12.26	6.30	4.21	1.72
SPRINGFIELD	8.49	15.75	8.42	5.17
SIG-SAUER	2.83	5.51	9.47	6.62

Caliber	2007	2006	2005	2004
9	87.16	80.62	81.05	75.86
40	11.93	19.38	18.95	22.41
45	0.92	0	0	0

Ammo	2007	2006	2005	2004
Handload	50.46	50.39	54.74	63.79%
Commercial	49.54	49.61	45.26	36.21%

Bullet	2007	2006	2005	2004
Zero	48.28	42.65	40.00	22.86
Montana Gold	22.41	29.41	22.00	37.14
Precision Delta	6.90	5.88	0	0
Winchester	6.90	0	4.00	0
Berry's	5.17	1.47	4.00	0

Powder	2007	2006	2005	2004
Hodgdon	53.45	49.30	34.00	38.89
Winchester	24.14	9.86	26.00	13.89
VihtaVuori Oy	20.69	33.80	36.00	41.67
IMR	1.72	0	0	0
Accurate	0	4.23	4.00	5.56

Holster	2007	2006	2005	2004
Blade Tech	60.75	64.57	50.55	47.37
Ky-Tac	11.21	10.24	9.89	10.53
Other	7.48	8.66	8.79	12.28
Complac	5.61	1.57	6.59	0
Safariland	3.74	6.30	8.79	15.79

and CZs have shown miniscule gains, but Para has dropped to its lowest level in recent memory, coming in sixth *behind Glock* in 2007.

Worse yet, Para all but disappeared from Production this year, with only one competitor (Para representative Debbie Keehart) fielding the 2002 Production title-winning LDA.

## **COMPONENT SECTOR**

### **Winchester Rising?**

After years of lackluster results in every category except primer choice (where Winchester has all but owned the semi-auto divisions), Winchester bullets made a surprising run toward the front this year. Winchester's numbers were up in Production, in Limited, and (marginally) in Open.

Even more surprising, we saw an advance in Winchester powders, reclaiming ground thought lost to Vihtavuori Oy and Hodgdon. Make no mistake, Hodgdon remains the top dog in the iron-sighted divisions, while VihtaVuori controls high-tech Open.

That said, Winchester took a noticeable poke at the leaders this year.

Winchester maintained its position as one of the more popular choices for factory ammunition as well. While they have a way to go to catch up with Atlanta Arms and Ammo, 2007 was a very good year for Winchester in the practical shooting field.

### **Moly Coated Bullets More Popular**

As jacketed bullet prices rise to nosebleed levels, it should come as no surprise that the next-best-choice, poly/moly coated bullets, have become more popular. The big winner here was Precision Bullets, rising some five percent in Limited. Bear Creek and Master Blasters bullets (two other moly bullet makers) also rose noticeably to take a chunk out of Zero.



**Blade-Tech holsters and moly-coated bullets found a poster child in top contender Robert Vogel, above.**

### **Montana Gold Fends Off Zero**

While Winchester, Precision, and Precision Delta made gains against Montana Gold, Zero fell back a bit, particularly in Open and Limited. Production shooters went more strongly for Zero bullets, but Montana Gold retook the lead in Open and re-took 10 percent worth of market share that Zero had taken from them last year.

Some of that Montana Gold gain in Open may be due to the Open National Championships appearing in Montana this year. Local bias or no, Montana Gold can still claim to make the most popular bullets in USPSA.

## **HOLSTER SECTOR**

### **Blade Tech Cutting Deep**

While Ghostholster and Rescomp continue to dominate Open and Limited, there's no denying the advance of Blade Tech. Not only did Blade Tech maintain its iron grip on Production (60 percent of those competitors), it advanced significantly against the high-tech holsters in Limited, eclipsing the traditional power Safariland and the cutting-edge Limcat! I'm not sure what to attribute that large gain to, but Blade Tech made quite a splash this year.

## **CALIBER SECTOR**

### **Major 9 Has Arrived**

Among the calibers, there's only

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one real story, and that's Major 9. In Revolver, Limited, and Production, the story's the same. They're dominated by a single caliber, with a minority of shooters in Production being different by shooting the .40.

In Open, the USPSA Board of Directors' policy change to allow the 9X19 at major power factor ("Major 9") has dramatically changed the playing field.

Look at the charts accompanying



this article and see the fading of traditional .38 Super. As Jo Jo Vidanes explained in a previous issue, the difference in brass expense combined with the new lower power factor has made 9X19 the caliber of choice for most of his customers who are building new Open guns.

Other gunsmiths stand by the Super, citing lower pressures and better longevity, but Major 9 has become a growing part of the landscape. Major 9 guns hit 20-24 percent of the field, up from 17 percent last year. I say "20-24 percent" because we had a block on the questionnaire for "9mm" and another for "9mm Major." Four percent of the Open shooters chose "9mm," but personally, I doubt that many of them intentionally shot a minor-caliber 9mm in a major-caliber game.

One of the joys of USPSA shooting is the flexible nature of its equipment rules. It's part of our mission as laid down by the late Jeff Cooper et. al. to **Major 9 has blossomed in Open Division. Over 20 percent of competitors use it. That's JJ Racaza at left.**

find out what's "best by test" in the world of firearms. As new equipment appears, it gets thrown into the grand crucible of USPSA competition, and the ferocious ingenuity of USPSA's membership does its magic. If that equipment has potential, it survives. If not, it rapidly disappears. (Seen a Browning BDA lately, an HK VP70Z, or a Colt Double Eagle?) These surveys help everyone to see what the membership thinks are indeed "best by test" within the confines of each division. One could say it's a giant popularity contest, but to win that contest, you've got to have a lot more going for you than good looks and a smile.

Now, when someone asks you "what's the best gun for Limited," you don't have to give them an opinion, you can answer as we do: "that's very much a personal choice, but 90 percent of the shooters at nationals used some form of high-capacity 1911, chambered in .40 S&W."

If they want to know where you got that number, tell them you saw it in *Front Sight!*





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Lisa Munson  
KC Eusebio  
Saul Kirsch  
Doni Spencer