



One-of-the most novel revolver of our time is back, with a longer barrel, nicer action, and the same splendid accuracy!

Photos by Steve Woods

It's hard for me to think of Chiappa Firearm's recently introduced Rhino series of double-action and double-action-only revolvers, without thinking of Ogden Nash's poem:

*The rhino is a homely beast,
For human eyes he's not a feast.
Farewell, farewell, you old rhinoceros,
I'll stare at something less preproceros.*

I'm sure the same lines have flashed through the minds of many shooters the first time they looked at this radically designed handgun. The four-legged rhino may indeed be a marvel of Nature, since we are told it has survived since prehistoric times. However, all Ogden Nash would have needed to describe this gun would be one more capital letter. The Chiappa Rhino is indeed a homely beast.

**GUN
TEST** 

CHIAPPA WHITE RHINO .357 MAG

With a revolutionary underbarrel design that minimizes recoil, Chiappa continues its charge on the gun market with the redesigned Rhino 40DS .357 Mag, featuring slight modifications that only enhance the revolver's remarkable accuracy.



By definition, cylinders are supposed to be round—but the Rhino has six flat sides, which actually does well to aid in ease of carry (above). The weight above the barrel counters muzzle rise, for better shot-to-shot accuracy (right).



Seen from any angle, “the Rhino is an ugly beast.” But beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and the revolver’s quirky design stems from practical modifications.



The sight axis is very high above the bore axis on the Rhino. Note the “spurless” hammer.



However, once you start actually shooting this gun, you quickly find out that there’s nothing preposterous about it.

Gun Details

Made in Italy by Chiappa, the Rhino harkens to an earlier Italian revolver, the Mateba. The barrel is mounted low, lining up with the bottom chamber of the six shot cylinder, not the top one. With the barrel so much lower and more in line with the long bones of the arm, the gun has much less leverage to rise upon recoil, and its lack of muzzle flip really has to be experienced to be believed.

The original came with a soft rubber one-piece grip, whose saw-handle shape gave excellent Luger-like pointing, and whose cushiony material made a .357 Mag load’s “comeback” straight into your hand feel as if you were shooting a .38 Special. The stock of the 4-inch model is slightly larger, but the same configuration, and wood. It sits very solidly and slip-free in the hand, but it does transmit a bit more recoil to the web of the hand. I frankly like the rubber ones better. Fortunately, they interchange.

The Rhino first appeared on the market as a blued 2-inch barrel concealment revolver. My latest sample, the gun tested here, has a 4-inch tube. Like so many other revolvers now, it uses a sleeved barrel. The additional 2 inches of sleeve appear to be an add-on, but it all blends in well from the aesthetic standpoint.

This gun is rendered in stainless. Inevitably, shooters instantly dubbed it “the White Rhino,” and the name seems to have stuck already. Shortly after I started testing this gun, I was told that a sub-species of the African Black Rhinoceros had been declared officially extinct. Fortunately, it doesn’t appear that the black Italian Chiappa Rhino is in

any danger of suffering a similar fate. The blued Rhino seems to be in also no danger of extinction any time soon; last time I looked, it was still in the catalog.

My first Rhino could be cocked to single-action, though it took a strong thumb to do so. Its double-action trigger pull was heavy, but smooth. On the white Rhino tested, the mechanism was the version that was updated to answer some users’ requests. It’s double-action-only, without a “hammer spur.” The pull weight averaged around 8 pounds, and I found it distinctly more controllable than the first version. It grouped well, and of course, all those 25-yard groups were necessarily fired double-action-only.

Working The Rhino

There are two things the shooter really has to bear in mind if he or she is going to adapt to the Rhino. One is that the currently popular autopistol grasp, with both thumbs extended forward toward the target and along the frame, will be dangerous with this gun! That’s because at least the forward thumb will now be in direct proximity to the gap between the cylinder and that low-slung barrel. It could cause a nasty burn even with a light .38 load, and with a high intensity .357 Mag round, damage up to and including partial amputation could result. Therefore, it’s imperative to shoot the Rhino with the thumbs curled down, the old fashioned way, or at least placed up and behind the cylinder.

The other concern is that if you’re only loading one or two cartridges, and you’re an old-fashioned unreconstructed wheelgunner, it takes a while to remember that with this gun’s clockwise-turning cylinder, the next shot to come under the hammer is going to be the four o’clock chamber, not the ten o’clock chamber. The

barrel is, after all, on the bottom instead of the top, and the gun will fire when the six o’clock chamber is aligned with the firing pin, not the 12 o’clock chamber as on conventional revolvers. This takes some getting used to. How do I know this, you ask? Sigh...trust me. I know this.

The cylinder latch is a lever up on the left side of the frame near the hammer, and is rocked back by the shooter’s thumb. I found it easier to work right-handed than left-handed. In fairness, however, I have a southpaw friend in Albuquerque who loves his Rhino, and he has no problems with that whatsoever. Officer Courtland Smith, another lefty, had no problems when he tested it, either. Maybe I only find it slower because I’m not a natural southpaw.

I had hoped to shoot an IDPA BUG (Back-Up Gun) match with my 2-inch Rhino, and just never got around to it. When the 4-inch came in this year, one of my first thoughts was shooting a regular IDPA match with it. I haven’t, though, because I’m short on the proper accessories. The universal-fit Law Concealment System holster was comfortable for concealed carry, but isn’t fast enough for IDPA when you have to shoot against Masters wearing very fast scabbards. Moreover, my preferred speedloader, the Safariland Comp III, does not work with this gun.

A turning-knob HKS speedloader in the L-frame size will work with this gun, but not the slightly faster Safariland loader, which holds its rounds more rigidly. The chamber spacing dimensions of the L-frame are just a little off from those of the Rhino. The loader I found worked best of all was the HKS in Mark III size, named because it fits the Colt Mark III revolver series. (It also fits the much more popular Ruger Speed-Six series.) This is what I carry my spare ammunition with when I’m wearing a Rhino. The HKS is compact, and the most rugged of duty

speedloaders in my opinion. However, its two-step operation of insert cartridges, then turn knob, is slower than the one-stroke insertion and release of a Safariland Comp III, and when you’re running against Master wheelgunners, you seldom win with two-step reloads when the other guys have one-step.

Still, judging by pictures I saw after the IDPA World Championship, at least one brave soul shot the match with a 4-inch white Rhino in the Stock Service Revolver class. I know he didn’t win the World Championship—that went to Craig Buckland, the current US champion, who shoots for Smith & Wesson and generally drives a K-frame S&W revolver.

I’d like to find out what speedloaders that adventurous competitor used with his white Rhino. I think it’s time I tried the SL Variant loader with this gun. I have not given up on the idea of “riding a Rhino” in competition.

Shooting Impressions

I had been extremely impressed with the accuracy of the 2-inch barrel Rhino, so I was eager to take the four-inch model to the bench. The White Rhino did not disappoint, at least with service loads. Please bear in mind that every shot was fired double action. That’s the only way the trigger option in the test gun is designed to run.

SPECIFICATIONS CHIAPPA WHITE RHINO

Caliber: .357 Mag/.38 Special
Barrel: 4 inches • **OA Length:** 8.5 inches
Weight: 29.6 ounces (empty) • **Grips:** Wood
Sights: Fiber optic front, adjustable rear
Action: DAO • **Finish:** Electroless nickel
Capacity: 6-shot • **MSRP:** \$896

Testing started with Black Hills Blue remanufactured .38 Special wadcutter. Despite the assorted brass, this affordable round has earned a reputation for match-winning accuracy. However, barrels rifled for optimum twist to stabilize 158-grain .38 Special and faster-stepping .38 and .357 loads are a bit slow for maximum accuracy with sluggish 148-grain full wadcutters. This particular lot of Black Hills Blue had shown itself to exhibit superior accuracy with long-barrel .38s. Out of the 4-inch Rhino, it put five shots into 2.30 inches. Three of those bullet holes showed signs of slight keyholing, meaning they were not perfectly stable and thus not flying absolutely true when they hit the target.

I always take at least two measurements of every five-shot group: one for all five, and one for the best three. The decades have taught me that the latter measurement allows sufficiently for unnoticed human error by the shooter to give a very good approximation of what all five rounds of that ammunition from that gun would have done from a machine rest, assuming no “called flyers.” Ten or eleven years ago, Charlie Petty and I did point-counterpoint testing to test this hypothesis, and discovered that the variance between the “best three” hand held from the bench and “all five” from Charlie’s expertly set up Ransom Rest was generally less than the variation between the different machine rest groups.

The best three of the Black Hills hits were in 1.05 inches. Given the keyholing signs, that told me that despite a less than perfect compatibility between the Rhino’s rifling twist and the beer-keg shape of the wadcutter bullet, there was some excellent accuracy potential here.

Next up was 158-grain Winchester round nose lead .38 Special. Over the years, it earned a reputation as a poor fight-stopper, but also as an extremely

accurate cartridge. It certainly proved itself so with the Rhino.

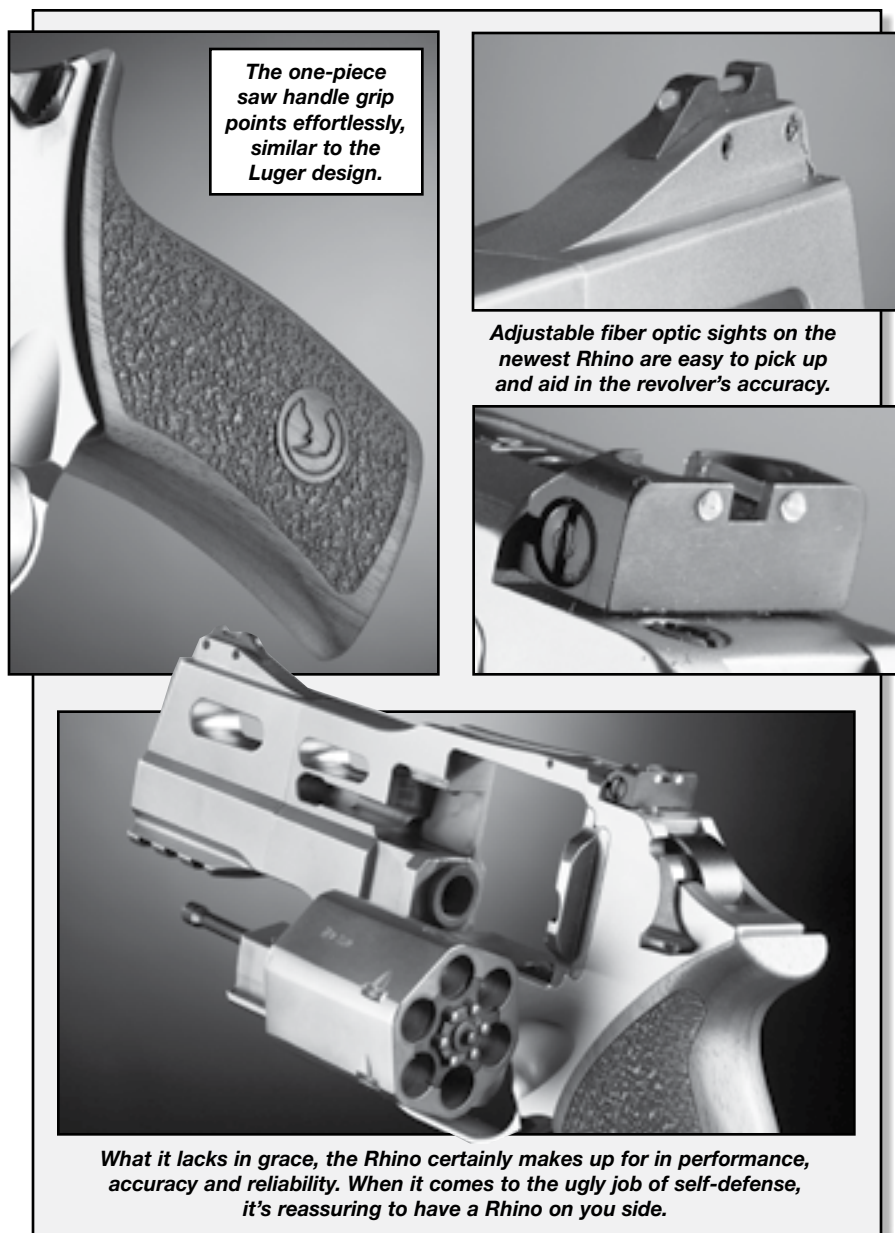
Five bullet holes clustered in 1.50 inches even. Four of those were in 0.65 inches: I suspect it was that “unnoticed human error factor” at work in the slightly strayed shot. The best three of those four hits included a tight “double” and measured 0.45 inches center-to-center. In other words, all of them would have hit a .45 caliber bullet nose-on from a quarter of a football field away. Needless to say, I was impressed.

The rationale of the Rhino’s design is recoil control. It is at its most impressive when firing full magnum loads. In the last quarter of the 20th century, the load that earned the reputation for being the most impressive “manstopper” was the 125-grain hollow point loaded to 1,400 to 1,450 feet per second (fps) of velocity. The full power 125-grain load I picked for the test was MagTech Gold, a jacketed hollow point with a wide cavity at its mouth.

Measurement of the whole five-shot group came out as 1.20 inches center-to-center. I measure to the nearest 0.05 inches. I strongly suspect that the old “unnoticed human error” factor reared its head again, because four of those shots were in only 0.65 inches.

But it was the “best three” cluster that caught my attention. They were in a one-hole cloverleaf so tight that I couldn’t exactly find the exact center of any one of the three bullet holes for measuring purposes. The outside edge diameter of the group was 0.40 inches: in other words, a single .40 caliber or 10mm cartridge standing atop the group would have hidden all three holes. I would ballpark-guess that the center to center group measurement of these best three constituted about a 0.75-inch group.

So, in summation...the white Rhino is a very accurate revolver!



The one-piece saw handle grip points effortlessly, similar to the Luger design.

Adjustable fiber optic sights on the newest Rhino are easy to pick up and aid in the revolver's accuracy.

What it lacks in grace, the Rhino certainly makes up for in performance, accuracy and reliability. When it comes to the ugly job of self-defense, it's reassuring to have a Rhino on your side.

I had heard on the internet that some folks experienced misfires with the new generation of lighter-trigger Rhinos. My test gun, serial number RH01802, misfired on three cartridges. All were MagTech .357s. I’ve not had that ammunition fail to light off its primers before. One round went off on the second try. The other two remained silent when hit by the Rhino’s firing pin a second time. All exhibited light indents. I took the “dud” cartridges and ran them through a Ruger SP101 I happened to have with me at the range. Each went off at the first pull of the trigger.

Carry

In 2010, my blue two-inch Rhino came with a very nicely made pancake-style leather hip holster. Not so the White Rhino. There ain’t a whole lot

of holsters for it on the market yet, and it doesn’t seem amenable to any of the holsters for my more conventional revolvers. The only alternative would be something generic.

I chose a Law Concealment System holster. This is in essence a flat pouch with a separator deep inside that allows the muzzle to optionally be tilted down behind the shooter, bringing the butt forward where it will “print” less. The holster folds over belt or waistband to secure on the belt. It was not a perfect fit; there was some slight trigger exposure. I discovered that one would have to force the trigger finger in to get it on the trigger of the 4-inch White Rhino while it was still in the holster.

Most today consider this a no-no. However, many of us can harken back to the years when revolver holsters routinely

had completely exposed triggers and trigger guards. Think the classic old Tom Threepersons speed holster design. Consider the Border Patrol holster, designed by one of their own, the late and much missed Bill Jordan. Therefore, I didn’t mind carrying the gun for a day, loaded with 125-grain magnum hollow points, in this rig.

It is a very pleasant gun to carry. The flat cylinder (yes, I’m allowed to say “flat cylinder,” because it’s descriptive even if it sounds self-contradictory) makes the gun feel thinner inside the waistband. There’s nothing on the gun that dug into me, even in tight to the body carry. The extra 2 inches of flat-sided barrel seemed to actually aid concealment. The barrel against the hip inside the pants seems to hold the butt in tighter to the body, reducing bulge and “print factor.”

A friend of mine bought a 2-inch Rhino after reading the review. He loves the gun, and swears that when he carries it, it feels as if he’s wearing his little Colt Detective Special .38. He says the Rhino is rapidly spoiling him for other revolvers.

Final Notes

I liked this gun. When I get a holster for it, I think I’ll try it in an NRA Police Service Revolver match. Times there are slow enough in that course of fire that an HKS speedloader is no handicap.

*I’m no Ogden Nash, but I’ll say this:
Weird as it looks, it sure does shoot,
And for accurate guns, I always root.
An ugly revolver is this Rhino,
But will I send it back? Why? NO!*

I hope the spirit of Mr. Nash will forgive me for being a little, uh, riposte-erous. If my poetic license is revoked, so be it. But the bottom line is, the Chiappa Rhino is a really, really neat little gun. I liked the first one I got, and bought it, with a credit card—so I could say I charged a Rhino. I like this one, too, and I think it’s gonna be staying with me.

For More Information:

Chiappa Firearms
937-454-0363
mkschiappa.com

HKS Speedloaders
800-354-9814
hksspeedloaders.com

Law Concealment System
800-373-0116
handgunconcealment.com

Safariland
800-347-1200
safariland.com

PERFORMANCE	
CHIAPPA WHITE RHINO	
Load	Accuracy
.38 Special	
Black Hills 158 WC	1.05
Winchester 158 RNL	0.45
.357 Magnum	
MagTech Gold 125 JHP	0.40
Bullet weight measured in grains, and accuracy in inches for best 3-shot groups from 25 yards.	