



# SMITH & WESSON – 686 HANDGUNS .357 MAGNUM

A Robust, proven .357 Revolver that shoots 7 shots and is easy to maintain and to control.

NETGUNSMITH.COM OVERVIEW: The Smith & Wesson 686 Plus is the proven .357 Magnum revolver that has enjoyed a vaunted spot in the marketplace of defensive handguns for more than three decades (the original 686 was introduced in 1988). This is a 7-shot .357 Magnum that offers significant heft which keeps the balance and recoil at acceptable levels and presents firepower that is rarely matched by other handguns. The high-quality stainless-steel construction produces a revolver that is capable of lasting generations with the proper care. One of the most popular guns in the S&W lineup, this “L-frame” revolver is well built and capable of use in hunting, home defense and personal carry scenarios.

A very well known legacy product from a proven manufacturer with all the right attributes for use in multiple shooting scenarios, including handgun hunting, self defense and home defense, target shooting (takes .38 Special ammunition also) and even concealed carry for those who wish for a full-sized gun.

7 shots of powerful .357 Magnum that is both reasonable in cost and effective from a stopping power perspective. It is easy to use and does not have an active safety to interfere with fast reaction times.

NOTES FOR CONSIDERATION: The 3 inch barrel variant weighs in at 2.3 lbs. despite being a relatively small variant of the model. It is hefty.



Shown, is the Smith and Wesson Performance Center 686 Plus.

This is a full-sized 7-shot .357 Magnum revolver that has been in the S&W product portfolio for decades. There are numerous variants of the famous revolver, some of which hold 6 and some of which hold 7 shots.

# \$725–900

General Pricing (Click to see exact pricing)



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Page:

[Smith & Wesson 686 Revolver](#)

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## Comparative Values of this Item (out of 10 possible points per metric)

**Relative Value Offered for Price on Market:** 8 out of 10 This item offers excellent value relative to peers.

**Ease of Use:** 10 out of 10 Netgunsmith.com feels this is an intuitive choice; safe for any shooter with basic training.

**Suitability for Hunting:** 7 out of 10 It's been used extensively by handgun hunters and is still viable.

**Suitability for Home Defense:** 9 out of 10 A classic choice for those who prefer a handgun for home defense.

**Suitability for Concealed Carry:** 7 out of 10 It is large, but some can justify the weight and bulk for carry.

**Suitability for New Shooters:** 10 out of 10 Can shoot .38 Special to train, and is easy to learn on.

**History and Reputation of the Brand:** 10 out of 10 Smith & Wesson has a great reputation.

**Cost of Ownership:** 8 out of 10 This is a reliable, easy to clean and relatively cheap to shoot firearm.

**Durability:** 10 out of 10 The design has been proven to be very durable and reliable in operation.

**Resale Value:** 9 out of 10 This firearm will hold its value quite well if no modifications are performed on it.

### Differentiating Factors:

The Netgunsmith.com team feels that the legacy of this firearm puts it in the top few choices of any industry list. The balance of the firearm is game changing, as it allows ease of handling, while the weight mitigates some of the snappy recoil of the .357 Magnum cartridges. 7 shots in a substantially similar size format to other medium to large revolvers that only carry 6.

### Notes:

This is a well-balanced but heavy firearm and may not be suitable for small shooters in some scenarios.

## SMITH & WESSON 686

Specifications of shown model (to the right)

**Style of Firearm:** Revolver

**Caliber:** .357 Magnum / .38 Special

**Capacity:** 7 Shots

**Weight:** 2 lbs. 3 ounces

**Dimensions:** Barrel: 3"; Overall length: 8.18"

**Materials used in Construction:** Stainless Steel

**General Pricing Range:** \$725-900

**Notes:** adjustable rear sight; polymer grips



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# Product Review for the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus .357 Magnum

## 7-shot stainless steel revolver



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**Strategic Consulting and Education**

A top end firearm from a famous maker.

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## **THIS IS THE TOO LONG; DIDN'T READ VERSION OF THIS S&W 686 ARTICLE**

The Smith & Wesson 686 Plus is the mainstream 7-shot .357 Magnum revolver that denotes there is still a high-quality product coming out of a commodity product manufacturer like Smith & Wesson, even it at comes at the expense of higher weight and more bulk.

You are getting a legacy revolver for a reasonable price and an intuitive tool that can be used to hunt, defend yourself or shoot at paper targets and minimizes maintenance. No active safeties and top-quality finishes and sights give you a great value for those who want a medium to large revolver for their shooting needs.



## **BULLET POINT REVIEW OF S&W 686 PLUS**

History means something. This is a firearm that has roots more than 30 years old, and which has consistently gotten better.

Yes, some of the safety mechanisms have been changed on this model over the years. It is still a fantastic firearm.

7 shots of .357 Magnum is a potent option from a stopping power perspective.

The value for the money is high because of the varied scenarios where this revolver can be used effectively. It is not a cheap handgun.

It's a heavy, robustly designed firearm, but it is not immune to concerns at the yoke/cylinder area. It weighs more than most traditional carry guns and has not been adopted widely as a carry gun. It is still a very good carry gun, notwithstanding, for those who can conceal it.

While it does not have a terrible trigger straight out of the factory, it's also not amazing. Consumers should understand that spring kits and trigger jobs can make this trigger one of the best double action triggers in the world.

Constructed with a very good grade of stainless steel that harmonizes ease of maintenance and aesthetics.

## A primer on NETGUNSMITH.COM Reviews:

You can look at specifications if you've ever owned a firearm and get a general sense of how a gun stacks up. A real review of a firearm should be honest, and unbiased. It should highlight the practical conversation about the gun. Sure, it'd be cool to have a million different ballistic tests and paper targets to show the accuracy and individual load performance, but ultimately there are not enough hours in the day to do the review or to consume it.

We have designed some parameters that we think will help two types of users to understand if a product is usable for them personally by reading our reviews. We try to gloss over specifications and look at the nuance of the product instead. We try to avoid talking about accuracy and other semi-intangibles (because a user controls a lot of that), unless we are talking about purpose-built products that live in the realm of ultra-precision shooting. We try to answer the questions that most websites and most gun stores don't.

Look to Netgunsmith.com to offer a unique insight to the way a gun works for a shooter. We also try to make things relative. How does the product shape up against peers in its field (see the "Comparative" section below)?

We try to answer some basic questions to help you understand what you will get with the product we are reviewing.

We also advocate for training and practice. Sure, we would like you to buy a gun on our links out to affiliates like Brownell's, Amazon, etc. because it helps us create content moving forward. What is more important though, is that you know how to use the gun properly, safely and with control. We highly recommend that you get legitimate training to handle your gun, and that you even consider renting one or handling it in a physical store before buying if you need to.

We want to answer 6 questions we feel can help you make a purchase decision on a shooting product.



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Who would want the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus?

How is the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus better than the rest of the field?

What are some of the things about the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus that underperform?

Why do I care about the Company that makes this?

What are the “X-Factors” for the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus, that I need to know about?

Is there any history about the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus that I need to understand?

### **Who would want the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus?**

The handgun home defense advocate. This is the best-case scenario from a practical perspective for this revolver. The only other thing that makes more sense, is using it for the fun of it. This is a great gun to shoot at the range or in the desert or with friends. So, ultimately if you just enjoy shooting fun guns, the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus is a great choice.

Additionally, the variants that are available make this gun a very good candidate for hunting, with the right barrel size and modifications. You might also find it a serious choice as a concealed carry, or a full-time open carry firearm if you are a bigger individual or prefer the revolver and want the extra shot capacity.

## **How is the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus better than the rest of the field?**

It's made out of 100% stainless steel for the frame, cylinder, barrel and associated core components. This makes it durable and rust resistant. It might not be everyone's cup of tea, but it's a work horse. The internal components are made out of a combination of high-quality steels that have a good retention capability, so the trigger maintains the feel; the lockup stays true and the performance doesn't degrade over time really.

It's got seven shots, in the same size platform as other guns that are only capable of shooting 5 or 6 shots of .357 Magnum.

It has history that proves the design is impeccable. 30+ years of proven reliability and solid accuracy has made this a very special revolver.

It can be modified heavily if you wish, which makes it a unicorn in the revolver segment. You can find aftermarket parts very easily for it, and some of it can be done by normal consumers with basic knowledge, without the need for a gunsmith (things like spring kits, etc.).

You are not going to have to worry about shooting it. It's not a safe queen, but it has classic lines and great aesthetics anyway.

## **What are some of the things about the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus that underperform?**

The trigger that used to be amazing from factory, isn't as great as it once was (and admittedly, some model releases also changed the trigger feel from model to model). You will need to do some deburring and spring work to make it as smooth as you can get on a 1,000+ revolver.

It's heavy, though it absolutely feels more balanced than most revolvers at this weight, so this may end up a draw across the board.

The grips are fairly pedestrian on some variants.

The sights are very good, but they are not specialty sights they are all-purpose sights.

## **Why do I care about the Company that makes this?**

Smith & Wesson has legitimate history. They did start to cut some corners about a decade ago during some strategic shifts in the consolidating market, and they sometimes don't champion some of the underlying second amendment concepts that some hardcore shooters do. From the perspective of the gun in this review, none of that matters, because they are still putting out a fantastic product in this model (the 686 Plus).

Smith & Wesson is also one of the only revolver makers that are producing factory full customs and they are legitimately the only company that has as deep a bench in the revolver field as they do. They are serious about wheel guns.

They make guns that last generations if you take them seriously. Smith & Wesson has produced a line of revolvers that is hard to beat in value for the price point. I don't care what some hater might say about the brand, I challenge them to find a better value on the market that can consistently deliver in the .357 Magnum spectrum at this price point like the 686 Plus can. They will have a hard time finding ANY competitor, let alone a viable one.

## **What are the “X-Factors” for the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus, that I need to know about?**

7 shots. Enough said. It's the same size as your normal six shot revolvers, but it has seven.

It doesn't have a problem with any ammunition. Lead, wadcutters, hollow points, different grain weights, it doesn't care it digests it all and it does so accurately.

Durability is hard to match by any other revolver. Sure, you have tighter, more accurate high tolerance revolvers, but they cost twice as much. Sure, you have guns that can be replaced at half the cost, or serviced for a pittance, but you give up the durability. The 686 Plus can last lifetimes if cared for in the most basic ways.

With the volume of guns that S&W is pushing out of the factory, the instance of bad guns that come through the pipeline is miniscule. Yes, you might read a bad review here or there, but Smith & Wesson deals in millions of firearms per year. The relative issues with guns are only a handful of those. You cannot find that with most high-volume producers regardless of cost.

## **Is there any history about the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus that I need to understand?**

There were some major changes that you will hear people grumbling about online. If you are new to revolvers, this is about as good as it gets as a first revolver in a Double action platform with proven history.

Most of what they grumble about has political roots and/or stems from the basic hammer bar/transfer bar safety that Smith & Wesson added in the middle round of model releases in the nineties and early 2000's. There is also some issue with the MiM hammer and other core components. This is a complaint that doesn't make sense. Yes, it's a cost cutting measure, but it shouldn't be a complaint because it doesn't change the durability or the performance of the product. It simply doesn't cause problems. It doesn't force recalls. It is a non-issue.

The gun is more than 38 years old if you factor in all variants. There was a legitimate concern in the past while the company fixed a problem with guns made before about 1986-7, where there was a cylinder binding issue. None of the 686 Plus models have this problem. You will see some simple modifications that have changes as new iterations have been released, like the "bosses" inside the side plate, and the shim concept that has been around since the 1990's regarding the yoke and cylinder float.

Our only legitimate gripe with the guns in this model range, is that the trigger has been historically inconsistent over the model releases generally, though it really isn't that bad.

## COMPARATIVE VALUES OF THIS ITEM (out of 10 possible points per metric):

**Relative Value Offered for Price on Market:** 8 out of 10 This item offers excellent value relative to peers. You can find guns that offer cool features for less money. You can find guns that cost more and deliver a better experience. It is hard to find a gun that shoots this caliber, and feels this solid, and has a reasonable price point like the 686 Plus.

**Ease of Use:** 10 out of 10 Netgunsmith.com feels this is an Intuitive choice; safe for any shooter with basic training. It's a nearly perfect first defensive handgun, because it doesn't require a ton of thought to use well. That is not an excuse to skimp on training, it's a testament to the value of the simplicity of the sum of all the parts that make up this firearm and how well they work together.

**Suitability for Hunting:** 7 out of 10 It's been used extensively by handgun hunters and is still viable. While a hunter may not take it on a large percentage of their hunts, it has value for those who desire to have a handgun that is field ready and offers enough stopping power for medium and small game animals between 35 and 275 pounds (within reason).

**Suitability for Home Defense:** 9 out of 10 A classic choice for those who prefer a handgun for home defense. Most people would be better served by a capable, shoulder fired gun for home defense, but there is something to be said for the potency and simplicity of the S&W 686 Plus. There may be some overpenetration concerns for the suburbs (but no more than with any suitable rifle), with the cartridge. Notwithstanding, it stops threats, it is easy to use, and it is safe to use, hence the great rating (9 out of 10).

**Suitability for Concealed Carry:** 7 out of 10 It is large, but some can justify the weight and bulk for carry. Smaller users aren't going to be using this firearm for concealed carry. It has been a duty weapon for many law enforcement units world wide and has the duty chops to fit the bill, it is just a bit bulky to hide for most shooters. If you can conceal it, you will love it as an EDC gun.

**Suitability for New Shooters:** 10 out of 10 Can shoot .38 Special to train, and is easy to learn on. The ability to learn with .38 Special cartridges and move up to .357 Magnums, and the ease of use and safety of this handgun makes it something truly special for beginners.

**History and Reputation of the Brand:** 10 out of 10 Smith & Wesson has a great reputation. For a company that has cut a lot of corners over time, this is a firearm that is still every bit as good as it was when it was released more than 30 years ago. Yes, it's different, yes there are some concessions for some shooters integrated in the design, but it is made well, and it is from a producer that has legitimate historical significance and reputation.

**Cost of Ownership:** 8 out of 10 This is a reliable, easy to clean and relatively cheap to shoot firearm. With the commodity rates on the market for .357 Magnum cartridges, and the durability of the materials and design of this revolver, it's a nice, easy to shoot gun that won't break the bank at a dollar a shot like some other guns that have a similar impact on the shooter.

**Durability:** 10 out of 10 The design has been proven to be very durable and reliable in operation. Very little needs to be said. With proper maintenance and normal use conditions, this gun will last a very long time; generations even. Shooting 10,000 rounds is a good start to “breaking this gun in”. Don’t swing/flip the cylinder up like you see in the movies and don’t impede the rotation of the cylinder forcefully, and you will never have a problem.

**Resale Value:** 9 out of 10 This firearm will hold its value quite well if no modifications are performed on it. It doesn’t have the same collector value that, say, a Colt Python does, but it will not lose value if it remains in good working condition. These things are very well built, and even with MiM hammers and hammer bars that some people hate, they will still sell out at most places.

**Notes:** This is a well-balanced but heavy firearm and may not be suitable for small shooters in some scenarios. You can buy a couple of different versions. None of them are particularly stand out, compared to the others available in the model range – meaning they are all equally good on the base level. You can pay more for creature comforts, but the accuracy and the durability and the smoothness of the design are all inherent in the base model too.

**Differentiating Factors:** The Netgunsmith.com team feels that the legacy of this firearm puts it in the top few choices of any industry list. The balance of the firearm is game changing, as it allows ease of handling, while the weight mitigates some of the snappy recoil of the .357 Magnum cartridges. 7 shots in a substantially similar size format to other medium to large revolvers that only carry 6.

## Conclusion

The Smith & Wesson 686 Plus Revolver is not a safe queen. It is not a newcomer, and it has a certain maturity that even legacy firearms don’t have. That presence and the longevity that the 686 has, provides the owner of the gun with a very interesting, and fun to own firearm that still delivers on all of its promises.

It’s not a perfect gun, and enthusiasts of the platform might find fault with the newest three model releases (at least), but there is not a person here that can name a viable contender for the market segment that this gun serves at the same price point. It overdelivers on every point it tries to compete on.

Consistency is the name of the game with this revolver and it’s hard to beat at that game. 30+ years of staying power, and it still sells out everywhere. That is because the Smith & Wesson 686 Plus is MUCH better than average.

## **THE AUTHOR'S PERSONAL COMMENTARY ABOUT THIS ITEM:**

"This gun came out before I was in high school. It was around the time I started shooting. I was a gunsmith's apprentice at 12 years old. This firearm predates that. From the moment it came out (among a sea of special guns like the Colt Python), it was the "daily driver"."

"It wasn't finicky or too highly polished so as to make it a safe queen. It didn't have the smooth trigger of the Python, and it sure didn't have that gorgeous deep purplish-blue finish. But it worked. It was accurate. It was solid. It was everything that the Smith & Wesson line had been crafting for decades, but it was also something new and innovative and it made a legitimate splash."

"For years, even though I owned a Python; loved it as a young shooter and thought it was awesome, I coveted the Smith & Wesson 686 Revolver as something I wouldn't feel guilty shooting. It wasn't until I was graduating high school that I bought my first 686 (which was ironically the 686-5; a pistol that many purists weren't enamored with). This was a favorite gun for me, and even though I sold it later to buy a different firearm, I still have fond memories of that first 686."

"It's ridiculously accurate, it feels good in the hand and it makes the shooter confident by just handling it. When you own one you trust it. If you don't own one yet, then you covet it. When you feel it in your hand you can't help but think about it long after you put it down. It's just a gun that feels like an extension of your body, from the balance to the clean looks to the no-nonsense attributes. I'm not a fan of a lot of things that Smith & Wesson, and many mainstream manufacturers are doing, but I hold this gun in high regard because it delivers on promises and it leaves no shooter unfulfilled when they own it."

**– Benjamin Worthen**

### **Benjamin Worthen Bio:**

Benjamin Worthen is a former Gunsmith of more than 20 years. He now works as a writer in the firearms industry and as a marketing consultant for several industries including the Political and Firearms arenas. He has worked in consulting capacities and as a contract vendor for the military and law enforcement agencies and as a firearms designer and engineer for proof of concept pieces and custom firearms. He is a vocal supporter of Second Amendment rights.



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