

THE GUNS OF HARRY SANFORD



By John Taffin

Twenty years ago, the gun and cartridge combination that demanded attention (and got it) was the AutoMag in .44 AMP chambering. The guns were coming out of T.D.E. in California and brass was made by trimming .308 Winchester to 1.30 inches and inside neck reaming to accept .44 caliber bullets of the same type as used in .44 Magnum sixguns. RCBS made the dies— still do— and commercial brass was made for a time in Mexico and bears a CDM headstamp.

Well-known handgunners such as Kent LoMont, Lee Jurras and George Nonte were particularly enamored with the AutoMag and the *Club d'AutoMag* sprang up for users of the new gun. The wildcat .44 AMP was necked down to form the .41 AMP, .357 AMP and .30 AMP calibers to name but a few. Most of these AutoMags were set up especially for handgun hunting.

The AutoMag was designed by Harry Sanford and had a number of manufacturers before its early demise.



Harry's Auto-Mags have been chambered in a variety of calibers over the years, some of which are wildcats only offered by AMT. From L to R, a 9mm Luger, 9mm Magnum, .40 S&W, 10mm and 10mm Magnum.

Stainless steel was just coming into use and the AutoMag was made of stainless, operated with a six-lug rotary bolt with the standard model being equipped with a 6½ inch barrel.

A big gun to be sure, the AutoMag weighed in right at four pounds fully loaded with eight rounds.

Harry's AutoMag did not survive, but it was the forerunner of today's Grizzly,

The colorful and controversial owner of AMT has fetched some mighty unusual guns to market. From the original Auto-Mag to the first .30 Carbine semi-auto to the innovative new On-Duty, Harry Sanford has never let tradition stand in the way of performance.



Willey and Desert Eagle big bore semi-automatics. More importantly, Harry still designs semi-automatics.

The AutoMags II, III and IV are still coming out of California from AMT (Arcadia Machine & Tool) which had recently changed its name to iAi (Irwindale Arms Inc.). But now they are back with AMT again.

It's all very confusing, but the name-switching was a defensive maneuver that Harry cleverly pulled to circumvent a frivolous lawsuit from some slimy bot-tofeeder. —Editor

AMT catalogs a complete line of semi-auto handguns including the AutoMag II (.22 WRM), AutoMag III (.30 Carbine and 9mm Win. Mag.), AutoMag IV (10mm Magnum and .45 Win. Mag.), Javelina (10mm), Hardballer (.45 ACP and 10mm), Bullseye (.40 S&W), and Skipper (.40 S&W and .45 ACP).

The latest to come out of AMT is the On Duty, a DA-only semi-automatic in .40 S&W chambering. I believe the oldest gun in the AMT line, now that all the Ruger Mark I clones have been dropped,

is the Back-Up in .380 and .22 LR.

I have not tested every one of the AMT semi-automatics, but I have had a close working relationship with nine of them over the past few years and one that goes back nearly 10 years.

The Back-Up

Pre-dating the switch to iAi, my wife's .380 Back-Up bears the AMT brand and an address of El Monte, Calif. Dot wound up with this little .380 because her business was owed \$100 and the debtor asked her if she would take the .380 instead.

At the time I knew little about the Back-Up and couldn't have cared less for the .380 cartridge. However, I was not disappointed in the Back-Up as I found an 18 ounce (fully loaded), six shot, very flat package that could be carried extremely easily— spelled c-o-n-c-e-a-l-e-d, legally of course— on either my wife or myself

The Back-Up is much flatter than a Colt Cobra, Charter Arms .38 or Smith & Wesson Chiefs Special. The little gun slips easily into pocket, purse, waist belt or boot top.

Reminiscent of the beautiful little

semi-automatics from Colt and Browning in the early part of this century, the Back-Up is hammerless. The gun has a safety on the left side, forward of the grip panel, and is single-action in design

The latest Back-Up out of AMT is double-action only.

Sights are nothing more than a trough with a very tiny front sight molded into the front end of the channel, but it is no great task to keep a clip full of Winchester Silvertips on a gallon jug at 25 yards. And that is definitely all that is needed with this little gun.

A few months back while shooting in the foothills, I ran into a young girl who was practicing on combat silhouette targets. From the 9mm she was shooting and the stance she was using, I surmised that she was probably a peace officer.

When I went over to talk with her, I found that she was a member of the Sheriff's Department, had just purchased a backup gun and, as it turned out, it was a .380 AMT Back-Up.

She was having second thoughts and was concerned that she would not be able

to hit anything with such a little gun. I set up one of my combat targets and stood her at seven yards. She then proceeded to empty the magazine of the little .380 into the head area in a very small cluster.

"I do not believe you will not have

the right side of the longslide version says "HUNTING MODEL," while the five-inch Javelina gives us more for our money with "WARNING READ INSTRUCTIONS MANUAL BEFORE HANDLING THIS FIREARM" and

the upstart 10mm from the very beginning. With its long heavy slide, recoil is minimal and the seven-inch Javelina handles heavy loads with ease.

The best factory load tested in the Hunting Model Javelina turned out to be Federal's FBI load, the 180 grain JHP at a rated 950 fps, but right at 1,000 fps in the long-barreled Javelina.

Extremely pleasant to shoot with its recoil dampening 51 ounce (fully-loaded) weight and groups like a target pistol.

Is the Hunting Model really a hunting pistol for anything other than varmints or small game?

With Hornady's 180 XTP at 1,300 fps, the Javelina should certainly be effective at short ranges on small deer and animals of the same weight class. It is definitely not a big game hunting pistol by any means.

It is a fun gun to shoot and sufficiently accurate for an untuned 10mm. It should be right at home in action shooting, short range silhouettes and even defensive use if the long barrel is not felt to be a hindrance.

Both models being standard 1911 style means cocked-and-locked is the standard mode of carry, and both models carry nicely in the Galco "Miami Vice" shoulder rig.

The only malfunctions that occurred in extensive firing with both models were experienced with the five-inch gun. The magazine lock would sometimes catch the slide and lock it open, a typical 1911



The little Skipper (above) is similar to an Officer's ACP, except chambered in .40 S&W. Also in .40 S&W (right) is the Bulls Eye Target Model, an accurized pistol akin to Colt's famous Gold Cup.

anything to worry about if you ever have to use your .380!" I pronounced.

And here then is the perfect role for the .380 Back-Up. A gun/cartridge combination that can be shot well by women or youngsters with small hands. And a hit with a .380 is definitely preferred over a miss with a big bore.

Women have even greater concealability problems with firearms than men, and here again the Back-Up fills the bill perfectly.

The Javelina

Two AMT Javelina 10mm's are available. The standard five-inch Javelina is a deadringer for the Colt Gold Cup and the seven-inch longslide Javelina 10mm is dubbed the Hunting Model.

Javelinas (I do love that name!) are bead blasted stainless steel except for the sides of the slide which are polished. These are typical Government Model semi-autos with grip safety, an extended thumb safety, slide release and magazine release button.

Triggers are wide and adjustable as on the Colt Gold Cup. The excellent sight picture is provided by a black Millett rear sight that mates with a black ramp front sight.

On both of the 10mm Javelinas one finds "AMT JAVELINA 10mm AUTOMATIC" on the left side of the slide. But



"STAINLESS-MADE IN U.S.A." Obviously the longslide is made for hunters and the five-inch for readers. Both are marked "AMT IRWINDALE, CA." on the right side of the frame.

The longslide Javelina was the first factory 10mm I ever fired and I have had more experience with it than any other Ten. It was a good selection to start with as it gave me a favorable impression of

malady that any gunsmith can adjust.

The magazine of the five-inch model was defective as it came from AMT and a call brought two more magazines with the explanation that they had experienced a bad run of magazines. Not to worry as all of the 1911 clones will accept the excellent Colt magazines anyway.

In fact, the Javelina Hunting Model either came with a Colt magazine or I

somehow switched magazines with someone somewhere.

While I had once found a Colt Gold Cup 10mm to very picky and erratic—it had been a real search to find a great shooting load—its Javelina clone was

Larry Grossman of AMT is responsible for the Skipper idea and he did it right. Too often “concealment” weapons are offered with short barrels and standard grip frames. Barrels are easy to conceal, butts are not.



The Hunting Model is a longslide 1911 design chambered for the potent 10mm Auto cartridge. This gun would be a good candidate for a red dot scope mount.

Sights are fully adjustable with a black ramp front with a large white dot, and the black rear Millett has two smaller dots, all designed for quick pickup in a combat situation.

The trigger is Gold Cup style, fully adjustable. It has not been touched as it came from the factory feeling quite good to me. Grips are checkered wood, and of most importance to me is the fact that they are typical 1911 style and can easily be replaced with custom stocks.

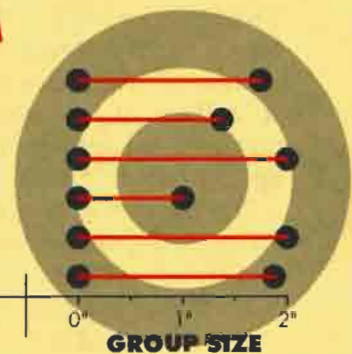
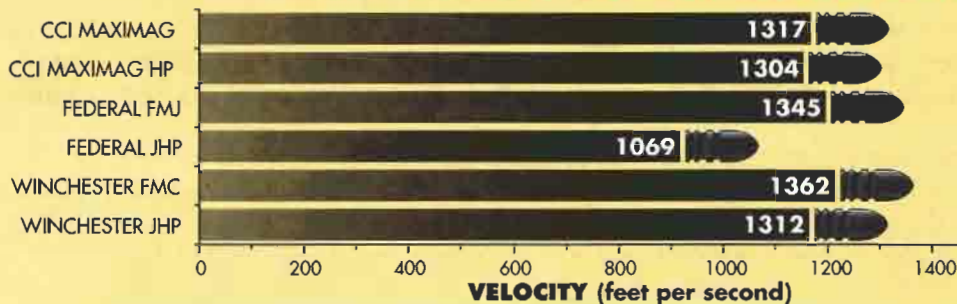
Weight is two pounds, five and one-half ounces (37.5 ozs.) fully loaded with eight rounds. This shows another great advantage of the .40 S&W cartridge, namely the ability to carry eight rounds in a gun this compact.

The finish of the Skipper is brushed stainless like all of the AMT semi-automatics. I have yet to experience a single malfunction with the .40 Skipper using either factory loads or handloads.

Accuracy is excellent for a gun this size. This could be due, at least in part, to the recoil spring guide rod below the barrel that helps line up the slide and barrel the same each time.

No target pistol by any means, but any time a concealable weapon this size can deliver 2½ inch groups with the punch of

AMT AUTOMAG II .22WRM



quite the reverse. The Javelina is also available in a five-inch .40 S&W as the Bullseye target.

The Skipper

Many of the .40 S&Ws offered are a little too bulky for ease of concealment. Not so the Skipper. Two of my good friends both pack Colt Officer's ACP .45's. These are excellent little defensive guns and I have been lusting after them for a long time. No more. The Skipper .40 has fulfilled the need.

While the first .40 S&W, the Smith & Wesson 4006, is a modern Third Generation double-action semi-automatic, the Skipper reaches far back into history and is a dead ringer for the basic 1911.

Well, almost.

The Skipper may start as a basic 1911, but it doesn't end there. In fact the Skipper reminds me of a Commander barrel and slide on a slightly shortened Officer's ACP frame.

The Skipper grip frame is about as small as a big bore semi-auto can get and still be controllable. This makes the Skipper just as easy to conceal as a Chief's Special. In fact, in most situations and for most people, even easier.

For my hands, the grip works perfectly with two fingers wrapped around the frame and the little finger under the butt. Actually in an easy kickin' gun like a .40 S&W, control is probably even better than with a standard size grip frame.

Standard 1911 safety features are found on the Skipper, grip safety and thumb safety both. The thumb safety is easy to operate and is of the extended variety. The slide stop also has an extension for easy operation and the magazine release button protrudes enough that it can be operated with the thumb without changing your grip. Simply move the little finger aside, push the button release with the thumb, and the magazine slides out completely. Field stripping is pure Government Model.

the .40 S&W, the gun has delivered all that is necessary. I like it.

AutoMag II

Good semi-automatic .22s are a real passion with me and the AutoMag in .22 Magnum now joins that list. I've never cared much for the large .22 Magnum six-guns as there is simply too much steel and too few holes in the cylinder. (The one exception to this was the ill-fated Smith & Wesson .22 Magnum Kit Gun, the Model 651 that has since been discontinued.)

Now we have a real .22 Magnum semi-automatic in the AutoMag II, a sleek two pound, stainless, 11-shot single-action semi-automatic.

Not only is it in .22 WRM, but also it is one of the trimmest field semi-automatics ever offered, and feels every bit as at home in my hand as the excellent Browning .22 Long Rifle chambered Buck Mark. Sights are fully adjustable, with a white outline

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rear Millett and a front ramp style with a orange "T" inlaid in the face of the blade. Unlike Most .22 semi-automatics, the AutoMag II carries an external hammer

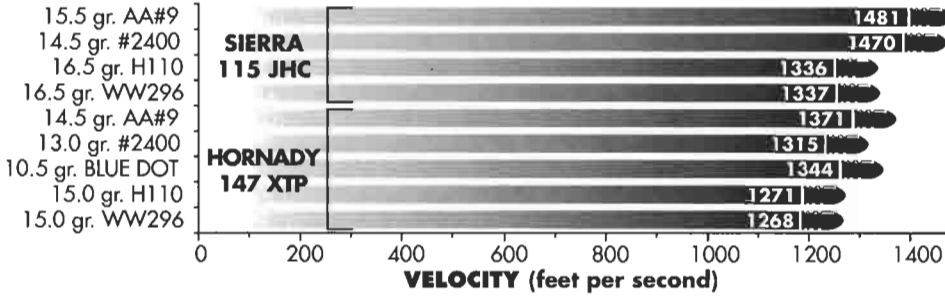
grip panels are black synthetic and beg to be replaced with a pair of wood grips.

The AutoMag II .22 RFM is an excellent choice for varmints and even small game, or any use that finds the .22 Long Rifle a bit lacking in power. Six types of .22 Rimfire Magnum ammo were put through the AutoMag II. At first, CCI ammunition would not function. The

but no guns have surfaced until recently. The cartridge without a home has finally found a resting place in the AutoMag III. First chambered for the .30 Carbine, the stainless AutoMag from AMT is a natural for the 9mm Magnum.

Weighing in at forty-nine ounces, the 9mm Magnum AutoMag is an excellent shooting Magnum semi-automatic. In fact

AUTOMAG III 9mm WINCHESTER MAGNUM



but cannot be carried cocked-and-locked as the safety simply blocks, but does not lock, the hammer. The thumb safety is slide mounted and pushes up to disengage. I can operate it with the side of my thumb without shifting my shooting grip.

The release for the ten-shot magazine is in the rear of the butt, and the unobtrusive, though easily operated slide release is at the forward top of the left grip panel. The

hammer would cock but the empty would still be in the chamber. After a hundred rounds were fired of various kinds of ammunition, this problem corrected itself and the AutoMag functions fine with all types of .22 Magnums used from Federal, Winchester, and CCI.

AUTOMAG II: Winchester 9mm Magnum brass and loaded ammunition have been somewhat available for years

it is an excellent shooting handgun period and needs to take a back seat to none in the accuracy department. I cannot say if this is a result of the gun, the cartridge, or both. I've never seen any factory ammunition so I have not had the opportunity to try the Winchester loaded 9mm Magnum which I have heard is a 115 grain bullet at anywhere from 1,475 to 1,550 fps. The latter muzzle velocity may be from the



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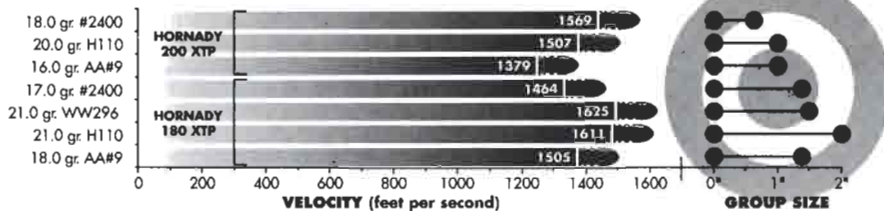
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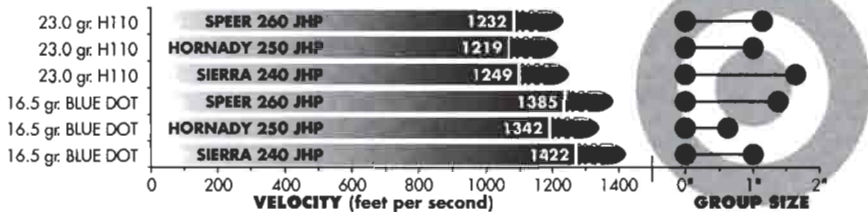
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AUTOMAG IV 10mm MAGNUM



AUTOMAG IV .45 WINCHESTER MAGNUM



six and three-eighths inch barrel length of the AutoMag.

The AutoMag III, unlike its AutoMag II predecessor is not neat and trim but big and bulky. It has to be to handle the semi-automatic kissin' cousins of the sixgun-housed .357 Magnum, .41 Magnum, and .44 Magnum, namely the 9mm Winchester Magnum, and in the AutoMag IV version, the 10mm Magnum, and the .45 Winchester Magnum. The stainless AutoMag III Nine Magnum is also of the

single action style but as with the AutoMag II is of the hammer block safety style and it also cannot be carried cocked-and-locked. The slide mounted safety is easily disengaged by pushing upwards with the side of the thumb. Magazine release is a button located at the front of the left side grip and the slide release is just above it. I can just barely release the slide release lever with the right thumb by shifting my shooting grip.

The grip is black synthetic and is very

large front to back for my hands and gives me the same feeling as the L.A.R. Grizzly which is I wished my fingers were longer to better hold on with.

As with the 10mm Magnum, all loads developed for the 9mm Magnum were strictly arrived at by looking at other cartridges, such as the 9mm, the .38 Super, the .38 Special, and the .357 Magnum, and trying to make a scientific guess as to what would work. I assumed that muzzle velocities would be somewhere in between the 9mm Parabellum and the .357 Magnum with comparable weight bullets and that is exactly where the 9mm Magnum falls. Closer to the .357 Magnum, then the Parabellum I might add.

Just what is the AMT AutoMag in 9mm Magnum good for? I certainly would not replace any of my excellent defensive sixguns or semi-automatics with the it. It is not so bulky that it could not be made into a four- or five-inch barreled carry gun, but since it is neither a double action pistol, nor can it be carried cocked-and-locked, it is unlikely to be pressed into service as a defensive gun. It does however make an excellent field pistol and cartridge for the hiker, camper, fisherman, etc., and is certainly adequately powerful for taking varmints up through coyote size.

Accuracy wise and handling wise it would make an excellent silhouette pistol cartridge, but not for the long range course where heavyweight bullets and a



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long barreled .357 form the minimum standard. Its niche would be as a Hunter/Field pistol cartridge on the short course and the IAI AutoMag III certainly has the accuracy for this game.

AUTOMAG IV: At the present time, the 10mm Magnum is a wildcat cartridge much like the .375 and .445 SuperMags and is likely to remain so. Guns and brass are available, but no loaded ammunition as this is strictly a load-it-yourself proposition. Not only is AMT the only source of guns chambered in 10 mm Magnum, they are also the sole source of brass. The AMT AUTOMAG IV 10mm Magnum with eight and three-eighths inch barrel (measured from the rim of the case to the muzzle end) weighs a hefty 54 ounces. But even so, after a day of pounding hundreds of full house rounds through the AutoMag 10mm Magnum, my wrist knows it has been in a fight. Actual felt recoil at the time of firing seems quite light for so much power, but the constant torque on the wrist results in some needed R and R for the firing hand. The AutoMag IV operates exactly as the AutoMag III and is set up the same way as to sights, safety, slide release, and magazine release.

Hornady's XTP bullets, both 180 and 200 grain weights, have solid copper bases and hollow points and are naturals for the 10mm Magnum. All test-firing was done with five shot groups at 25 yards with velocities measured on an Oehler Model 35P.

The AutoMag IV 10 mm Magnum has definite applications as a hunting pistol and a long range silhouette pistol. Shooting informally at long ranges of 100 to 200 meters and using rocks as targets convinced me of this. Anything the .41 Magnum can do, the 10 Magnum can also do and perhaps do it even a little faster and a little better.

The AutoMag IV is also now available in .45 Winchester Magnum chambering and is a dead-ringer for the 10 mm Magnum AutoMag except for the large hole in the end of the barrel.

The .45 Winchester Magnum is quite a good cartridge and definitely in the true Magnum class and the AutoMag IV should do fine as a long range silhouette pistol. While definitely too large to be carried as a defensive or law enforcement weapon, it should make a fine hunting pistol when properly handloaded.

AMT offers the most extensive line up of semi-automatics in the industry. With guns already out in .22 Long Rifle, .22 Rimfire Magnum, .380, 9mm, .40 S&W, 10mm, .45ACP, 9mm Winchester Magnum, 10mm Magnum, and .45 Winchester Magnum, one can only guess what will be coming next. The original AutoMag did not survive but it has spawned a long list of impressive semi-automatics.



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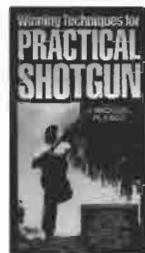
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