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Test Report

HUNTING
with the
**.44 AUTO
MAG**

SHOOTING
BLACK POWDER
SHOTGUNS

INDIAN TRADE GUNS

By Jim Serwen



HUNTING with

TEST REPORT BY WALTER RICKELL

THE MAGNUM revolver has, for the past few decades, been the all towering symbol of handgun power. The basic reasoning behind these cartridges was to give the .33, .41 and the .44 more power but design the cartridge so it could not be loaded into the standard chamberings of the lighter weight guns. Hence the .357 is basically a .33 Special with a case .125 of an inch longer with all the other aspects remaining the same, except for case capacity; the same applies to the .41 and .44 magnums.

One of my basic complaints about the whole thing is the ungodly recoil, especially in the .44 magnum. Of course, many shooters will roar with laughter at this statement, but I like to enjoy my shooting and not being a sadist, it's not my idea of fun. This image of harsh recoil might be nice to impress your friends, but one well placed shot from a lesser caliber will be more effective than a miss or near miss from a magnum.

Oh well, so much for that. Its not only my opinion, but also that of the designer of the .44 Auto Mag, Harry Sanford, an avid handgunner and hunting buff with the big revolver. So, for

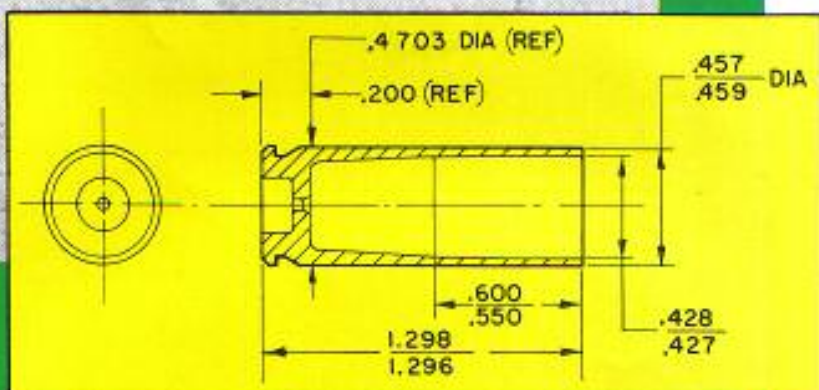
the .44 AUTO MAG





The practice of inserting a round directly into the chamber is not recommended by the factory and the shooter should, instead, load the magazine with the desired number of rounds and then insert it into the pistol in the normal fashion.

The dimensions of a .308 cartridge case formed to .44 Auto Mag shown at right.



the past 6 years Harry has been kicking around the idea of a more dependable .44 magnum repeating pistol. Realizing that the revolver is dead and the single shot impractical, the approach to the semi-auto was taken.

Two years ago he came up with a working solution, a prototype pistol. The gun was massive, but still smaller than its revolver counter part, and made entirely of stainless steel. The pistol itself resembled an oversized silver HD Military High-Standard but featured a rotary schrouded bolt similar to that of an M-16 rifle. The cartridge was also new, the old .44 Magnum rimmed case would not function reliably in the pistol and the extra added width of the rimmed case was unnecessary. The .44 bullet diameter was retained but the case redesigned, keeping the same length. The cartridge was basically constructed from .308 or .30-06 brass cut down to the proper length of 1.296 inches and reamed or swaged to the proper dimensions (see chart). Also the case was sans a roll crimp, resembling an elongated .45 ACP cartridge, headspacing on the case length.

On several occasions I have had the opportunity to shoot the Auto Mag at the local Pasadena Civil Defense Range with pleasant results. Accuracy was comparable with the available commercial target autos and recoil was mild. But these early models had several features I didn't care for. For instance, the slide could not be locked to the rear without an empty magazine being inserted, hence there was no facility for the weapon to be made safe manually as is common in present semi-auto pistols.

Another feature was that there were two trigger adjust-

ment screws and in order to adjust them the whole barrel assembly had to be removed. In most target autos that have such adjustments they are located on the face of the trigger with adjustment achieved without disturbing any part of the gun. There were other cosmetic items such as sights, stippling on the grips, etc. . . . but after discussion with Harry Sanford and Jerry Ognibene of the Auto Mag Corporation, it was promised that they were sound criticisms and that they would be incorporated into the productions models.

During these sessions at the range I witnessed a new gun going through its growing pains and the development of a new breed of cartridge that goes with it. The present .44 bullets are designed for the revolver, and at present feeding problems are developing with the flat nosed semi-wadcutter designs, but eventually these will be remedied with some newly designed bullets along the .45 ACP ball or semi-wadcutter style.

The big auto seemed to function with various loads interchangeably, which is uncommon in such a weapon. Due to its unique delayed blow back, rotary bolt design this pistol handled loads of 8 grains of Unique and 22 grains of 2400 interchangeably. Of course this left the bullets to finding their own point of impact, and it's only proper to get a load that works and stick with it.

A few months after visiting the plant and watching the pistol steadily go into production, I was sitting around pondering just what Harry was doing with the big auto when the phone rang, breaking my train of thought. To my surprise Harry Sanford was on the other end with an invita-

tion to meet him the following weekend at the Dye Creek Preserve near Red Bluff, California, to try out the final production model .44 Auto Mag on wild boar. So after getting directions I met Harry and Jerry late that following Friday afternoon at the entrance to the ranch along the Sacramento River.

Among our hunting companions for the weekend were California State Senator H. L. "Bill" Richardson and his son Doug. Bill, a long time advocate of guns and hunting was there to really ring out the Auto Mag, put it through its paces and answer the questions "Is there really an Auto Mag and how does it work?"

The Dye Creek Preserve is one of the few ranches in California which serves a dual purpose. Primarily a cattle ranch with over 400,000 acres of deeded and leased land, the operation has found new outlets to further use its land by cashing in on its natural resources, Black Tail and Mule deer, fishing, and wild boar. We were there to try our luck with the wild boar, one of the toughest animals to kill, a logical choice for the Auto Mag.

The boar season runs from November to May and is controlled entirely by the ranch, (California doesn't have a season on pigs except in Monterey county). So the ranch is the primary guardian of the species, keeping tabs on their habits, tagging, preserving the pure strain, etc. The reason for the winter hunting season is that this is the time the pigs are in prime condition with the acorns on the ground and the wild onions at their thickest. There are approximately 1,300 feral pigs on the ranch with the herd well managed and tagged during the off seasons.

Soon after we settled down at the base camp cabin, Jerry broke out two small black attaché cases and invited Bill and myself down to the pond, only a few yards from the cabin.



Harry Sanford (left) and Jerry Ognibene look with satisfaction at the results of many years of hard work and testing. Note size of the gun.

.44 AUTO MAG PRELIMINARY LOADING DATA

General Information

TEST GUN - Production .44 Auto Mag pistol
 BARREL LENGTH - 6 1/2 inches TWIST - 1 in 18 inches
 GROOVE DIAMETER - .422 BORE DIAMETER - .430
 TEMPERATURE - 68°F PRIMERS - CCI 350

BULLET	POWDER	VELOCITY (F.P.S.)
180 Gr. Super Vel	24 Gr. 630-P	1653
180 Gr. Super Vel	25 Gr. 630-P	1687
180 Gr. Super Vel	26 Gr. 630-P	1751
180 Gr. Super Vel	19 Gr. 1020	1295
180 Gr. Super Vel	20 Gr. 1020	1482
180 Gr. Super Vel	21 Gr. 1020	1605
180 Gr. Super Vel	25 Gr. 2400	1596
180 Gr. Super Vel	26 Gr. 2400	1699
200 Gr. Speer	18 Gr. 1020	1402
200 Gr. Speer	19 Gr. 1020	1525
200 Gr. Speer	20 Gr. 1020	1585
200 Gr. Speer	22 Gr. 630-P	1570
200 Gr. Speer	23 Gr. 630-P	1624
200 Gr. Speer	24 Gr. 630-P	1680
200 Gr. Speer	22 Gr. 4227	1355
200 Gr. Speer	23 Gr. 4227	1303
200 Gr. Speer	24 Gr. 4227	1375
200 Gr. Speer	22 Gr. 2400	1485
200 Gr. Speer	23 Gr. 2400	1561
200 Gr. Speer	24 Gr. 2400	1574
240 Gr. Speer	8 Gr. Unique	980
240 Gr. Speer	10 Gr. Unique	1230
240 Gr. Speer	12 Gr. Unique	1346
240 Gr. Speer	17 Gr. 630-P	1259
240 Gr. Speer	18 Gr. 630-P	1319
240 Gr. Speer	19 Gr. 630-P	1384
240 Gr. Speer	20 Gr. 630-P	1428
240 Gr. Speer	18 Gr. 2400	1252
240 Gr. Speer	20 Gr. 2400	1378
240 Gr. Speer	21 Gr. 2400	1435
240 Gr. Speer	22 Gr. 2400	1479
240 Gr. Speer	15 Gr. 1020	1245
240 Gr. Speer	16 Gr. 1020	1329

Arriving there Jerry began to set up a target on a fallen log about 45 yards away for Bill and myself to sight in the Auto Mags he had brought along. Soon after the targets were arranged Jerry opened up the mysterious black cases revealing the silvery new Auto Mag with its accessories. One of the first things he demonstrated was the manual slide lock and one of the trigger adjustment screws repositioned on the face of the trigger.

Up to this point I had only shot handloads in the Auto Mag but this time Jerry brought along the entirely new .44 Auto Mag commercial ammo. The new factory round is packaged in a striking red, white and black box sporting the Auto Mag logo. The load is made by *Cartuchos Deportivos De Mexico, S.A.*, Guernavaca, Morelos, Mexico, and sports a 240 grain jacketed hollow point of Auto Mag's own design that moves out the muzzle at 1350 fps. There are plans for a lighter weight 225 grain bullet which has the same dimensions but a concave base.

Bill loaded up a clip full of the bright new fodder and sent the slide home putting a round in the chamber. Taking careful aim he squeezed (Continued on page 58)



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THE NEW .44 AUTO MAG

(Continued from page 43)

one off with the slug finding its way to the 9 ring of the target. This was the first time Bill had fired the gun and mild recoil was much to his pleasure. Jerry checked both of us out on the pistols, handed me a box of .44 ammo, a Safariland model 103 holster, made especially for the Auto Mag, and we started back to the cabin.

Later that evening we sat around discussing politics and the Auto Mag, with Harry bringing to light some astounding figures. For instance, they had sold over 2500 pistols long before one was ever delivered. This is some acceptance of a new gun!

Next day I hunted with Jerry, Harry and our guide Ralph while the Senator and his son tried another canyon. We spotted many good sized boar but none came up to what we were looking for and as darkness came upon us, we headed for the cabin. Next morning, running into the same problem and with the taste of that baked ham still in the back of my mind, we forgot about the trophy and settled for pork chops. Soon we spotted a herd of sows and Jerry and I each took one at a distance of 40 yards.

Jerry's was a neck shot and mine a head, with both sows dropping instantly as if something had just pulled their feet right out from under them. Instant humane kills are common at this range with the Auto Mag. My pig scaled out at 180 while Jerry's tipped it at 175 pounds.

Getting back from the hunt and up to Angeles Shooting Range in little Tijuana Canyon took only hours for some serious testing and evaluation of the new entry into the handgun field with 250 rounds of commercial ammo. Factory ammo was used in the test for two reasons; I'm not much of a hand-loader, and if you really want to test a semi-auto, saddling it with handloads that could have numerous discrepancies due to known and unknown factors, would not give a real evaluation of it's functioning and accuracy.

The 250 rounds were fired through the piece with no malfunctions or serious problems. Ejection was good with the empty case clearing the shooter well to the right. The magazine loaded easily and the trigger held its adjustment of four pounds with a clean, crisp pull. Accuracy was good with all shots staying in the black at fifty yards

and at twenty-five yards 10-ring possibilities were the case.

The pistol was pleasant to shoot; no sharp recoil, just a forceful push, although noise was about the same as the .44 Magnum revolver. The silvery sights are a bit disturbing on the conventional black center target, but the colored inserts and the white outlined rear do help in a hunting situation. The windage and elevation are adjustable with an allen wrench instead of the standard slots. This I have doubts about for the biggest problem I have always had with allen wrenches is that you can never find one when you want it and if you do it is the wrong size! Also, the rear blade is perpendicular (90°) to the axis of the bore and as it is elevated the blade is canted forward, causing serious light reflection. This could be remedied by canting it to the rear like the BO-MAR deluxe blade; if the blade was black it would be of great help.

The front sight is a ramp style which is integral to the barrel. The face has space for two special colored tape inserts. This type sight is only good for a fast draw. I wish it were removeable on a dovetail, then the shooter could have a choice of a undercut blade, ramp, or whatever he wants.

After the shooting session the gun was field stripped and cleaned. The gun breaks down into two basic units with no small parts or the like to lose, and it can be assembled in seconds. Also the tolerances are so close on this frame and barrel assembly that they can be interchanged with other models without fear of head space change, accuracy loss, etc.

Cleaning was easy for the stainless steel sheds the dirt and debris after a thorough wash with nitro solvent. Afterwards, the parts were given a coat of Auto Mag lubricant which was selected and specially formulated for the stainless steels used in the pistol.

The overall length with the 6½-inch barrel is 11½-inches and the sight radius is 10½-inches. Total unloaded weight is 57 ounces. The overall feel is massive, the grip is large and having a somewhat average hand, I can barely get a comfortable grip and position on the trigger. For someone who has smaller hands he's out of luck. The back and front straps are grooved but not sharp, the stocks are polyurethane