



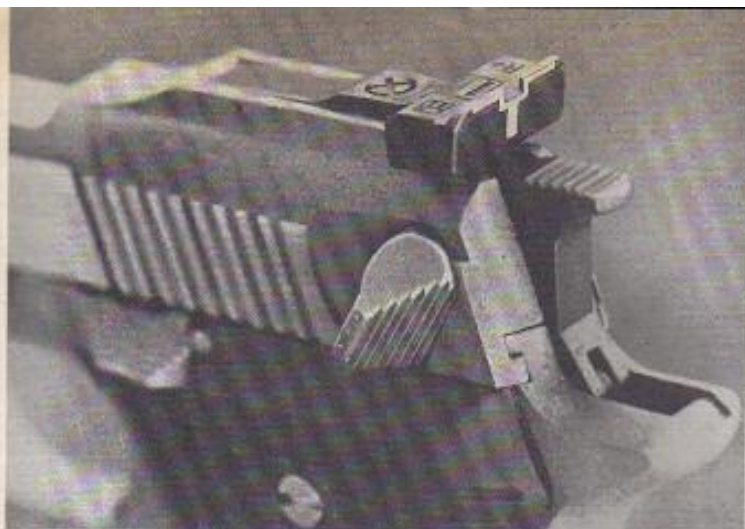
AMT's Automag II *a refreshingly new pistol*

Here's a look at the first truly successful auto pistol that chambers the powerful 22 WMR cartridge. In shooting over 3000 rounds, the author's gun didn't miss a beat.

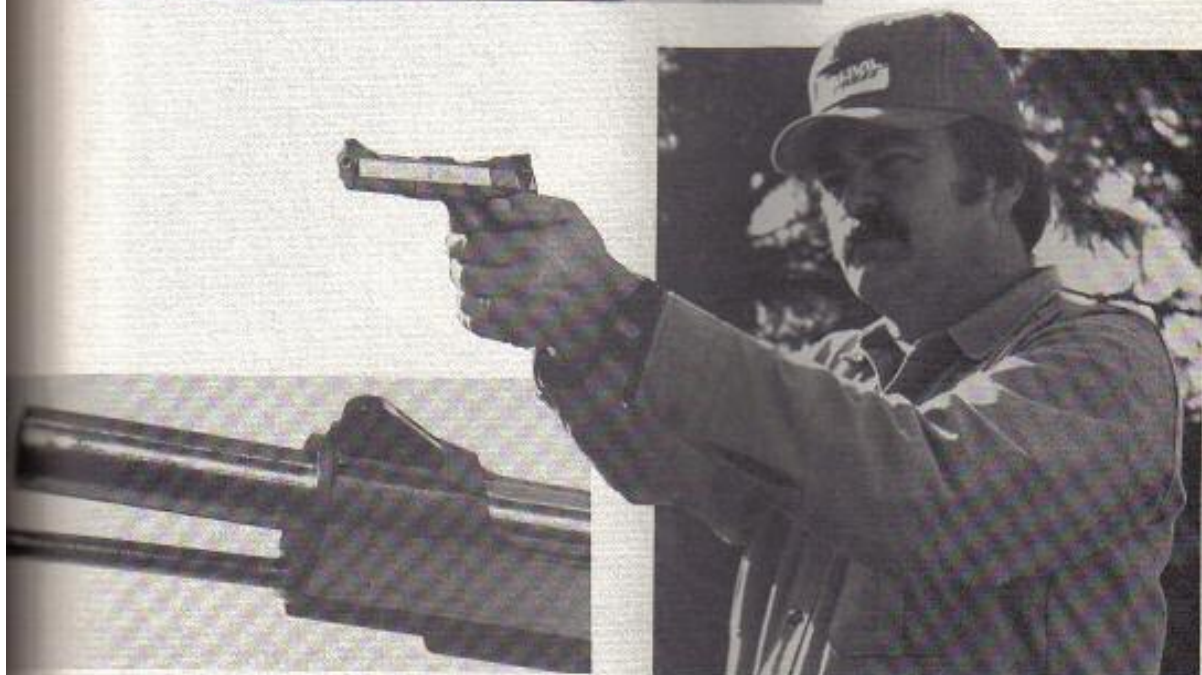
by JIM GOSNELL

ASK FOR THE UNUSUAL in the world of guns and chances are that someone will hand you an AMT Automag II. No, this isn't a wild "Buck Rogers Space Gun" or something that Dirty Harry will want to carry. Rather, it's a functional as well as good looking handgun which fills a definite void in the firearms industry. The feature making this stainless steel wonder unique is that it is the first truly successful semi-auto handgun designed for the 22 WMR cartridge, a rimfire round which has been around for close to 30 years.

AMT (Arcadia Machine and Tool, Inc.) is no stranger to stainless steel. The 44 Automag was their creation as



Gosnell found the Automag II to handle well in his tests. The excellent Millett sights contributed to the gun's accuracy potential. Below left—The front sight has a blaze-orange insert, while the rear (left) uses white around the notch, and is fully adjustable. Hammer-block safety is below the sight.



was the Hardballer, which is a stainless copy of the Colt Government 45 ACP. They also offer a long-slide version of the Hardballer for "Pin" competition and a shortened model for concealed carry. The line-up also includes the Backup, which is a small auto offered in either 22 Long Rifle or 380 ACP, as well as other stainless steel handguns and rifles chambered for the 22 Long Rifle.

Appearance of the Automag II is pleasing, looking somewhat more slender than its big-bore cousins and the finish is "first cabin." The frame and the top of the slide have a gray matte finish while the sides of the slide are brushed and bright. This,

along with the grooved black plastic grips, provides a very attractive contrast. The jury is still out, however, on the open-top slide which was done to save weight, I suspect, and to aid in cooling of the barrel. It might look a little cleaner without that cut-out. There are no sharp corners to snag things on, which adds to the "user-friendly" characteristics of this handgun. When I first picked the gun up I noticed that it fit very well in my hand and it has excellent balance. Operation of the safety, the slide release, and cocking of the hammer are all accomplished easily without shifting the gun in my hand. Slide operation is a breeze with the comfortable grip

providing ample leverage.

The trigger guard is squared off to provide a finger rest for the support hand. This is a feature made popular by many of the big-bore combat autos and, though cosmetically appealing, it is a feature that I prefer not to use since I have a tendency to pull the gun down when using the finger rest. Quite a number of people have enjoyed success using the finger rest but, try as I might, I just can't seem to get consistent control of the gun by using it.

As if the Automag II didn't have enough going for it, the guys at AMT topped it off with excellent Millett sights. If you are among those who



Field-stripping the Autmag II is quick and simple. Counting the magazine as one unit, there are only nine basic parts when stripped. Grid is 1/2-inch squares.



The Autmag II magazine holds 10 rounds of 22 WMR but Gosnell found it much easier on his thumb to load only eight shots. Magazine release is on the butt of the grip.

have never had the opportunity to use Millett sights, you are really missing one of the joys of handgunning. The blaze-orange ramp front and white outline "longhorn" rear just seem to line up naturally. The rear sight is fully adjustable for windage and ele-

vation and the screws are large enough that you don't need a watchmaker's screwdriver to make the adjustments. Finally, for those of us who seem to forget which direction to turn the screws for correction, the sight is marked with arrows to assist.

Another good feature on this gun is the safety. When activated, a steel bar rolls out beyond the firing pin to prevent contact by the hammer. Operation of the safety is very positive with equal pressure required to place it in either on or off position. With the safety on, the gun can be dry fired. This makes for some excellent practice sessions but, as with the handling of any firearm, be positive that the gun is unloaded before pulling that trigger.

The magazine release is located on the heel of the grip and is large enough for easy, positive operation. Personally, I'd love to see this gun with a 1911-type release on the side of the grip. Maybe that's asking too much, but it sure would be a nice touch. The magazine holds 10 rounds but forcing the 9th and 10th rounds in

proves to be somewhat of a chore. For comfort's sake I have been loading the clips with 8 rounds.

Lately, most handguns seem to leave the factory with rather heavy triggers and the Automag II is no exception. I would guess this has something to do with the growing number of product liability suits. Mine broke at 11 pounds, which explains the 4-inch groups that I got when I first shot the gun! I was beginning to think that a hydraulic assist would be needed, but a local gunsmith worked the gun over and the trigger now breaks at a very crisp 5 pounds. What an improvement! But be warned that the Automag II is not a simple gun internally and only a *competent* gunsmith should attempt to do any trigger work on it.

From a function standpoint, the design of the Automag II was no easy task. Due to a late peak pressure of the 22 WMR, the case mouth tends to stick in the chamber causing extraction problems. Larry Grossman, designer of the Automag II, solved this problem by drilling 18 holes at 90 degrees to the chamber in a series of three rows of six holes each. A sleeve was then welded over the chamber with just enough clearance to allow gases to pass from the first set of holes back to the next two rows, thus equalizing the chamber pressure. Fired cases clearly show powder stains from the chamber holes. Absolutely brilliant and, best of all, it works! And, I have yet to experience any fouling of the holes.

There's no doubt that we have a fine gun here, so let's take a look at what we're going to feed it. As stated earlier, the 22 WMR has been around for nearly three decades. Although it was designed as a rifle cartridge, the first gun on the market was the Ruger Single-Six. As a matter of fact, Ruger had their gun available before Winchester released the ammunition! The 22 WMR is one of those cartridges that sparks controversy every time someone mentions it and, in this writer's opinion, it has received a considerable amount of unwarranted bad publicity. In just about every debate concerning the 22 WMR the same four negative points surface: it's too loud; it's too expensive to shoot; it's too destructive on small game; it's not accurate. Now, let's take a look at these complaints on an individual basis.

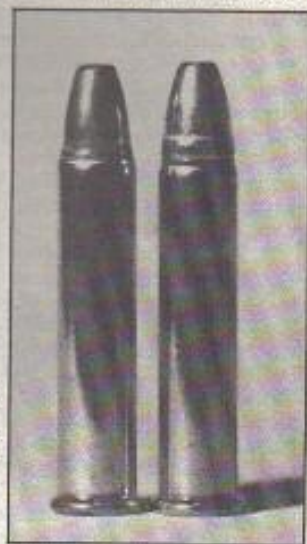
1. Too loud. No one in their right mind would shoot any firearm without proper ear protection. Even a 22 is capable of causing permanent hearing loss. In today's atmosphere of



Author found RWS and Federal's new 50-grain ammunition to give the best accuracy. The Federal load shoots under 1-inch groups like this at 25 yards.



Right—Federal now makes two bullet weights for the 22 WMR, the 40-grain (left) and 50-grain (with the wider bullet band), both jacketed hollowpoints. Above—it's tough to tell the difference between the 40- and 50-grain boxes—No. 757 is the heavier bullet.



health awareness it amazes me that anyone would shoot without ear protection. So, that argument doesn't hold water.

2. It's too expensive to shoot. If compared to a 22 Long Rifle, sure, it's more expensive but that's not quite fair. The 22 WMR is a lot more, ballistically, than a Long Rifle. Let's look at it compared to the 38 Special which, next to the 22 Long Rifle, is America's favorite plinking round and, on the average, lists for \$15.00 per box. The 22 WMR lists for \$6.70, which is less than half that of the 38. It is more costly than the Long Rifle, but you do

get more bang for your buck here.

I know, you reload your 38s and it costs you one hell of a lot less than \$15.00 a box. So, let's take a peek at it from that angle as well. Using list prices again, you still have to shell out between \$3.75 and \$7.00 per box for components, depending on the bullet and powder used, and this does not include the cost of brass or your time. If you are loading on a single-stage press it takes a considerable amount of time just to load one box, let alone 3 or 4 boxes for some weekend plinking. Not having to reload and chase brass can be worth quite a bit. I have been



able to find 22 WMR at a local sporting goods store for \$4.25 per box and, by doing a little shopping, I'm sure that you'll be able to find some pretty fair prices in your area. In my book, the 22 WMR is still pretty cheap to shoot unless you plan to shoot several hundred rounds a day. Don't get me wrong—I do enjoy reloading, I just like shooting better.

3. Too destructive on small game. For the most part, I have found this to be a myth as well. Used in a handgun, the 22 WMR is almost ballistically identical, if not somewhat superior, to the 22 Long Rifle when used in a rifle. Hence, we have the power of a 22 rifle carried neatly on the hip and I have found damage is minimal in taking small game with the 40-grain FMJ. When used to its full potential in a rifle, the 22 WMR can be destructive on animals such as squirrels, especially when a hollow point is used. My suggestion here is to make a head shot. I'm quite pleased with the performance of the 40-grain FMJ and use it almost exclusively.

4. Poor accuracy. Here again we have an unwarranted black cloud hanging over the 22 WMR. I own a Smith & Wesson Model 48 (in 22 WMR) which has printed $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch groups at 25 yards and, fed properly, the Automag II holds a close second to it. Granted, my Model 48 is a target-quality gun sporting an 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch barrel, but we are talking about the round being inherently inaccurate. To my way of thinking, that sure blows

Good looks, fine handling characteristics and flawless functioning all combine to make the Automag II perfect for taking small game and a great plinker. Because it's made of stainless steel, maintenance is less of a problem.

There are only four makers of 22 WMR ammunition—Federal, Winchester, RWS and CCI. FMJ, JHP bullets (40- and 50-grain) and shot cartridges (except RWS) are available.

that rumor out of the water.

Currently, the only ammo makers producing 22 WMR are Federal, CCI, Winchester and RWS. All are made with a 40-grain bullet with the choice of FMJ or hollow point. Federal has just recently released a new 50-gr. hollow point which shows great promise. Federal, CCI, and Winchester brands are readily available in most areas while the RWS is a might scarce. On a local search for the RWS, I came up empty handed but was finally able to locate some through Dave Cumberland at The Old West Scrounger in Montague, California. If you are having trouble locating anything in the way of ammunition, especially the odd-ball calibers, there is an excellent chance that Dave has just what you are after.

A note enclosed with the Automag II indicates that there might be a problem with the gun malfunctioning



when using CCI ammunition loaded with flake powder. I didn't experience any such problem but should you find this to be true, CCI will replace your ammunition with their current run which is being loaded with ball-type powder. As a matter of fact, I didn't find any round that failed to cycle the gun with the single exception of the CCI shot cartridge, and I fully expected that.

When shooting the various types of ammunition over my Oehler 33 Chronograph, I found most to average about 1400 fps. The fastest proved to be the RWS at 1495 and the Federal at 1460. Not bad considering a 22 Long Rifle 40 grain is still short of 1300 fps out of a 20-inch tube. My gun seems to show a preference for both the RWS and the new Federal 50-grain ammo, both printing just under an inch at 25 yards. The Federal 50-grain number clocks in at 1250, quite



Uncle Mike's #5 Sidekick holster fits the Automag II nicely. Their belt, extra clip holder and pouch make for a nice outfit to carry the gun.

a bit slower than its little 40-grain brother. Still, muzzle energy is about the same and, since it's accurate, I'll stick with it.

Another Automag II owner I talked with said that his particular gun favors CCI. This goes to show that guns of the same brand and model can be very individualistic. It is important that you try all brands of ammunition available in order to determine what works best in your gun. With the trigger job, all of the ammunition tested prints under 2 inches using a sand bag rest. I have managed a few off-hand groups under 2 inches using the Federal 50-grain loads.

As with any new-on-the-market handgun, finding a holster can be a trying experience. My search turned up Uncle Mike's #5 Sidekick which fits the Automag nicely. I bought one in camouflage along with a belt, extra clip holder, and a pouch which will hold two boxes of ammo. This rig has proved to be a real winner when it comes to utility and economy. It is light in weight and very comfortable to wear. Combined with the Automag II, it can't be beat for small game hunting trail use.

In testing the Automag II, I have put over 3000 rounds through the gun and the only malfunction was an occasional failure of the slide to remain open after the last shot. If you get the impression that I'm a great fan of the 22 WMR and the Automag II, you're right on target. This is a perfect marriage, making a good cartridge that much better.

It's been a long time coming but the Automag II has arrived and let's hope it's here to stay. We now have a fine handgun for small game and varmints as well as plinking. The best part is that it is just plain fun! ●



New Models

There were quite a few new things to see at the SHOT Show this year, but I had a nice surprise when I stopped by the AMT booth. Since the introduction of the 6-inch model, AMT now has two new versions of the Automag II and they're just what the doctor ordered.

The first new model should be available by the time you read this, with a release time in mid- to late May. It is a 4½-inch version with the same magazine capacity as the 6-inch. This will be a great sidearm. It'll be to carry and, unless I miss my guess, will not suffer much in the ballistics department from the 6-inch model. With the shorter barrel, this gun looks a little more balanced than its brother with the longer nose. I have a strong suspicion that I have found my trail gun!

The next version out will have a 3½-inch barrel and a magazine capacity of seven rounds. AMT is looking to penetrate the defence and the police back-up market quite a bit deeper with this model. Even with the shorter grip this gun fits very comfortably in my large hand. This gun will be easy to conceal and should do very well in its intended market. It should be available around September of 1988.

List price for both of these new models is said to be the same as the original gun—\$329.00.