

IS THERE AN IDEAL HUNTING HANDGUN ???...

...two top experts disagree!!!
so...you be the judge



PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM BROWN



IS

...two top experts disagree!!! so...you be the judge

By Ross Seyfried

Ross Seyfried maintains that anyone hunting with a pistol like the scoped and custom stocked Remington XP-100 (above left) is really using a "short rifle" and should not call himself a handgun hunter. Bob Milek believes that fixed open sights have no place in the hunting field and anyone using a handgun, even as potent as the .454 Casull (above right), on dangerous game does it to bolster his ego.

The very first firearms were by strict definition handguns because they didn't have stocks that touched the shooter's shoulder. I'm talking about bamboo tubes full of black powder and rocks. Some evolution has taken place since then, and possibly some digression, because today every firearm that doesn't touch the shooter's shoulder is called a handgun. In my opinion that isn't how we should define handgun. There is really only one basic reason for a handgun, *portability*. It is this quality that makes a handgun. The handgun is in fact fired without touching the shooter's shoulder, but it is how you carry it that makes it a real handgun. The holster is the primary means, but pockets, purses, garters, briefcases and saddlebags also fill the bill. There are too many ways of carrying a handgun that make a handgun a handgun to list, but there are two "carries" that make a firearm *not* a handgun: both hands or a sling. That is, if you need a sling or both hands to carry your gun around in the field, it ain't a handgun. But take heart, it still might qualify for "short rifle" status.

Handguns were originally designed primarily for personal defense. Personal defense handguns rarely get

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caught up in the confusion. Personal defense is a real world that doesn't allow much room for misdefinition of the tools. The very properties of portability, concealment and fast accuracy pretty well keep that closet clean. Someone wandering around with a 5-pound, scoped single shot slung around his neck would look a little silly in the FBI academy, and if he really needed to defend his person with his "handgun," he would probably die for his mistake. In short, there can be

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very little confusion about what a handgun is when someone carries it for personal defense.

There are two environments where the handgun has almost lost its identity. They are the grand sports of hunting and silhouette shooting. The I.H.M.S.A. (International Handgun Metallic Silhouette Association) has allowed the word handgun to be stretched into a grotesque creature. Winning in their unlimited world is done with a short rifle, not a handgun. Heavy single shots chambered for rifle cartridges are the order of the day. These fellows need to take a look at their title. There are some glowing exceptions in their sport. These are the classes that require the shooters to use revolvers or shoot standing. Now the fellow that stands on his hind feet and hammers steel rams at 200 meters or more with a production revolver is damn sure a handgunner—the kind of fellow that Elmer Keith, the first Outstanding American handgunner, would take his hat off to!

Handgun hunting suffers from an even more advanced case of misdefinition than the competitive sports do. There are no rules in hunting to define handgun; the accepted criterion seems to be only that the gun isn't fired from the shoulder. The handgun hunter can use almost any contraption he wants and still call himself a handgunner. Single shots of all descriptions, bolt actions chambered for rifle cartridges included, still qualify as handguns. Add a sling and a high-powered scope and you will be even more at home in this crowd. I really only have two problems with their misuse of the word handgun: first, it takes the honor away from the hunter who really is a handgun hunter, and second, many lose sight of just how underpowered their short rifles really are.

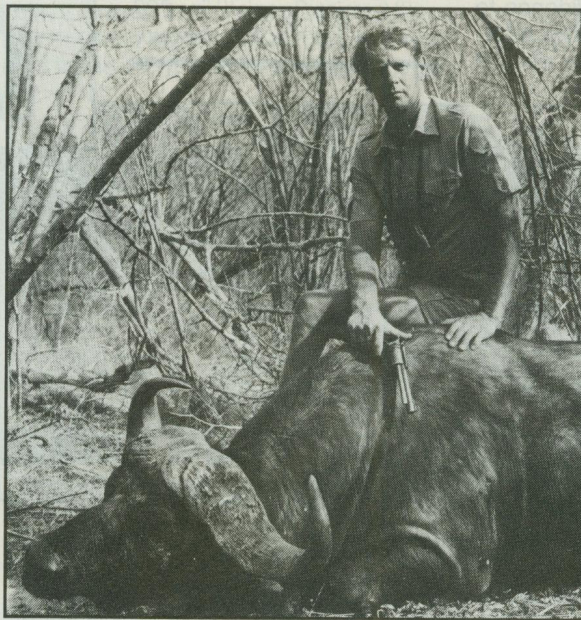
I am a handgun hunter and have the greatest admiration for those who pursue the sport in its true sense. Handgun

hunting by my definition can be described with two words: skill and difficulty. Hunting using a real handgun (one that you can carry in a holster, that has open sights, that you can hit quickly with, and that has a barrel of less than ten

stalked to within 75 yds, using a real handgun, is not only an awesome field marksman, but a skilled hunter as well.

The fellow who zaps a buck 200 yards away with a scoped bolt action chambered for a rifle cartridge has only killed

Seyfried believes that scoped, bolt-action handguns are really "short rifles" with the stocks sawed off (R). He prefers to hunt with wildcat magnum handguns with open sights (below).



The Linebaugh custom Seville (top), one of Seyfried's favorite handguns, is chambered for .45 Colt Magnum. He is currently experimenting with a more potent cartridge, the .51 Magnum (L).

inches) is a tremendous challenge. This hunter, if he is successful, has to be a great shot, a superior woodsman and, most of all, be prepared to go home without ever firing a shot. Because his tools are mechanically inferior to a rifle, he must be prepared to refuse shots in poor light or ones that are too far away for his skill level.

Elmer Keith's skill level ranged to several hundred yards with his pet 4-inch .44 Mag. Most ordinary men and women will have to quit shooting at less than 100 yards. The essence of handgun hunting comes not from how far you shoot, but from how well you hunt. The handgun hunter who can consistently take bucks through the ribs after he has

a deer by comparison. The other problem with our fellow and his short rifle shooting big game at long range is that he often forgets that he still has an arm with relatively low power.

If I were to write a story within these pages praising the virtue of the 30/30 with its 150-grain bullets traveling 2,300 fps as a long-range cartridge, I would be laughed right out of print. The short riflemen with their 7mm BR, 357 Herrett or 35 Remingtons are firing bullets of 150-200 grains at velocities just over 2,000 fps and *thinking* they have long-range arms because their bullets are going faster than a normal .44 Magnum. The real truth is that they have arms that are

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extremely marginal performers on animals over 100 pounds. If they stretch the range too far, wounding is a very likely possibility. These arms are so shootable (easy to hit with) with their optical sights that if the shooter is given time to wiggle into some benchrest position, he can easily hit game at ranges well beyond the cartridge's ability to make clean kills.

The addition of an optical sight to an ordinary handgun more or less excludes it from my definition of a handgun where hunting is concerned. The scope makes the gun cumbersome to carry and makes it much easier to hit with. I'm the last one to say anything against any aid for precise shot placement, especially on game animals, but when we talk

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about handgun hunting in its real sense, shooting skill must take the place over mechanical devices. Hunting skills must put the hunter within the range that he can handle with iron sights.

There is one exception: the hunters whose failing eyesight makes the use of iron sights impossible. For them the scope is the only alternative. The hunting handgun fitted with a scope of 2X or less reopens the door to handgun hunting for those with poor vision.

Now that I have said what I believe a handgun isn't, it's time to look at what a handgun is. The "teaching" handguns, those you should learn to master handgunning with, are the .22s or the .38 Specials. An airgun that is more or less shaped like a normal firearm is even better due to its lack of noise or recoil. Revolvers or autos with barrels in the 4 to 6-inch range are just right. Handguns used for personal defense more or less dictate what they need to be in size and shape; the actual cartridges are subject to continual debate. Anything that goes bang will be better than fingernails. I pick the .45 auto, and none are as good as a 12-gauge shotgun.

Handguns used for hunting are the most confusing. In most cases, I prefer to use the handgun in the hunting fields as a tool of opportunity. (That, by the way, was the original intent of a handgun: a tool that was there when you needed it.) Generally speaking, the hunting handgun is at its best when it is carried as a companion to a rifle. A handgun with a sensible size and shape, carried in either a belt or shoulder holster, can

be used to take advantage of shots within the capability of both the cartridge and the shooter. A hunter can take advantage of a good stalk, and other conditions suited to the handgun, while still having his rifle to take the extraordinary trophy at long range or just bring home the bacon when the handgun fails.

Handguns suited to hunting either as a companion to a rifle or as a primary arm are more or less the same. The selection of cartridges and loads is relatively limited. The .41 Mag is a little light for anything bigger than small white-tails, but loaded with long, heavy bullets it can

be effective. The .44 Mag will probably always be the king of hunting handguns for all but the most specialized hunters and conditions. The .44 is alright with the standard 240-grain Keith bullets, but heavier bullets make it a lot more gun. In the S&W Model 29 I like to use a 275-grain bullet of the Keith shape. In Ruger's Redhawk or Blackhawk and various single shots, the truncated cone bullets weighing 300 to 320 grains offered by SSK and others are the very best hunting loads available for the .44. The .45 Long Colt using 310-grain Keith bullets

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At the top of Seyfried's list of all-time favorite handguns is the S&W .44 Magnum (right). He feels that the .44 Magnum is the king of hunting handguns and is suitable for all but a few specialized hunting situations. Below, he shoots his Model 629 from a modified Creedmoor position.



Linebaugh Ruger Bisley conversion (top) in .51 Mag. While Seyfried espouses cartridges of .44 caliber and above, he has confessed to a secret love affair with a 2½-inch S&W .357 Mag. (L).

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in the strong Rugers or single shots is even better than the .44.

Specialized revolvers chambered for the superpowered .45s—Linebaugh conversions and the Casull revolvers—using cast bullets weighing in the 350-grain range are the finest big-game handguns in the world today. The last class, the super heavyweights, belongs to the .510 Linebaugh and the new .475 revolver that is being made for me. These are tools of the specialist, designed for hunting dangerous game or for taking the biggest game on earth. They launch bullets over 400 grains at velocities in excess of 1,200 fps. While they are still underpowered compared to really heavy rifles like the .458 Winchester, they begin to stand shoulder to shoulder with ordinary rifles. Their huge bullets with deep penetration have the power to actually



For hunting kudu in Africa, Seyfried chose a stock 4-inch S&W Model 629 and open sights to take a record kudu.

break down animals over 1,000 pounds. There is a drawback though: recoil reaches levels that only a few men will ever master, and the hunter who hunts big game must master these guns if he is going to use them in the field because no power level is sufficient to make up for poor bullet placement.

The actual guns used as launching pads for these hunting handgun loads leave the hunter with a wide choice. Revolvers or single shots with iron sights both qualify. Generally, barrels should be under 8 inches long if the hunter is going to carry them effectively. I won't try to carry a handgun with more than six inches of barrel. While the longer barrels give higher velocities and longer sight ra-

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dius, they are so cumbersome to carry that I lose interest in them quickly. Yes, the single shots are fine hunting handguns. Like the single-shot rifles, they are an added challenge, and an added incentive to place the first shot with absolute precision. A T.C. Contender with a six or eight-inch barrel chambered for the .45 Colt or even the .444 Marlin round is an exceptional hunting piece. Just be sure you don't add the 14-inch barrel, a scope and a sling and ask me to call you a handgunner.

I suppose this piece won't be complete until I tell you what my all-time favorite handguns really are. I confess that for some reason I have very little use for .22 LR handguns, so I will leave them off. The 4-inch-barreled S&W .44 Mag has been such a part of my life that it may always head the list. My secret love affair with a 2½-inch-barreled Model 19 S&W .357 Mag isn't revealed too often. This little fellow is delightful to carry, extremely fast and has taken game at over 100 yards for me. I like it best because it is the one gun that really taught me to shoot. I spent years learning to master it, both single and double action. The short barrel is absolutely unforgiving, but if you do everything right its accuracy is awesome. For personal defense, if I can't have a shotgun to hide behind, I want one of my supertuned Colt .45 autos or

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my old Colt Commander polished by Armand Swenson. John Linebaugh's .45 Colt made on an extinct El Dorado frame is the finest hunting handgun I have ever used. Its 5½-inch barrel balances perfectly and delivers a 345-grain bullet at just under 1,500 fps. With all of its horsepower, this gun hits better for me than any handgun I have ever fired. It was this gun that went with me into the thorns of Africa after a wounded Cape buffalo. Walking out unscratched made me friends with this gun for life. When I get one just like it made on a Ruger Bisley it will be my favorite shooter, with the old "buffalo gun" holding my sentiment.

I am sure some of what I have said about handguns has invited your hate mail, but be sure you don't misunderstand. Just because what you are shooting isn't a handgun by my definition doesn't mean I am not on your side. If you shoot, I am proud of you for every grain of powder and ounce of lead that you fire. We are all shooters together. Just be sure that if you call yourself a handgunner you deserve the honor. 🐾