

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 Bob Milek

Some 42 years ago, I poked six rounds of .38 Special ammo into the chambers of my dad's Colt Officer's Model Match revolver, hitched up my pants and wandered into a sage-rimmed dry gulch in search of a mess of cottontails for our evening meal. Even back then a handgun was a tool for me—a handsome, beautifully balanced tool to be sure—but still a tool with which I plied my favorite sport—hunting.

In the intervening years I've devoted a good share of my time to the handgun, cartridges to shoot in it and to the sport of handgun hunting. Unlike many handgunners, I've been quick to accept the single-shot (break-open, bolt-action, and falling block) pistols, handgun scopes, and modern high-velocity cartridges that have brought the sport of handgun hunting out of the dark ages. I'm especially proud of the fact that I've been directly involved in the development of some of these products designed to greatly extend the range and efficiency of the handgun hunter.

After all these years I still look at a handgun as a tool. I have a job for it to do, and any handgun that can't do the job as efficiently as possible has no place in my gun cabinet. As I see it, a handgun is a sporting firearm to

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.

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be used for hunting. I'm not now and have never been into competitive handgunning, be it paper punching, metallic silhouette shooting, combat competition or benchrest matches. I have no argument with those who derive hours of sat-

the subject from a philosophical bent because the handguns I use and how I use them are a manifestation of a basic handgunning philosophy I've developed over the years and one to which I rigidly adhere.

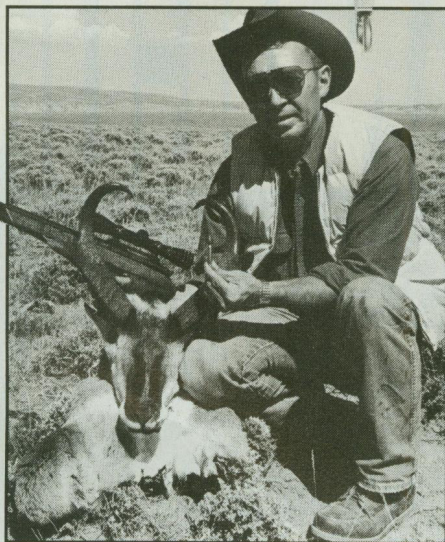
dives concerning a specific handgun or cartridge.

I've been in the hunting game for a long time—over 40 years, both professionally and for my own pleasure—so I've had ample opportunity to observe firsthand how both rifle and handgun cartridges perform on a wide variety of game. It's my opinion that no handgun cartridge presently available, commercial or wildcat, is adequate for taking big, dangerous game. Sure, it's been done and will be again. But what has this to do with anything? That's like saying that because someone navigated the Grand Canyon of the Colorado in a canoe, canoes are the proper craft for floating the Grand Canyon. Canoeing the Grand Canyon and handgunning big, dangerous game are nothing but tricks designed to bolster the ego of the participants.

There's no room for tricks in the hunting field, and any time you go after big, dangerous game—game that professional hunters recommend be taken with rifle cartridges like the .338 Winchester Magnum, .375 H&H Magnum or .458 Winchester Magnum—you're playing a game that's grossly unfair to your quarry and damaging to the credibility of the entire sport of handgun hunting. The same is true when you choose to use a handgun/cartridge combination that's inadequate for the job you have for it or stretch the shooting distance at game

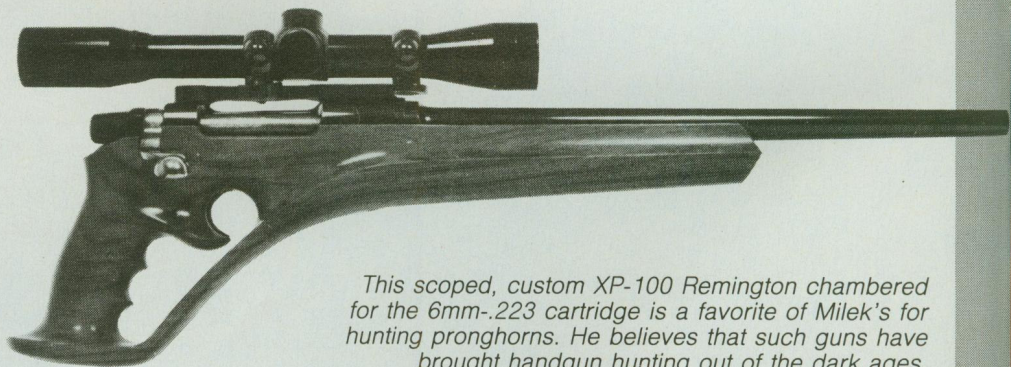


Milek favors custom handguns with scopes such as the Mag-na-port Stalker, above, and the Remington XP-100, right, for hunting antelope.



isfaction from these sports, but me, I'm a hunter. I'd hazard a guess that of the thousands of rounds I fire through handguns each year less than half are fired in practice, load development, testing and sighting in. All the rest are fired at live game in the field. This isn't difficult to believe when you realize that I go through

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This scoped, custom XP-100 Remington chambered for the 6mm-.223 cartridge is a favorite of Milek's for hunting pronghorns. He believes that such guns have brought handgun hunting out of the dark ages.

several five-quart ice cream buckets full of .223 Remington and 6mm-.223 handloads each spring just shooting varmints.

Obviously, my definition of a handgun is far different from that of those whose interests lie in other areas of the handgunning sports. Nevertheless, because of the diverse shooting conditions encountered in the field and the variation in game size and stamina, I have some guns in common with just about every pistol shooter regardless of interest.

Any attempt on my part to define what a handgun is to me in mechanical terms would be nothing more than a hasty repeat of the hundreds of articles I've written on pistols and handgunning over the past quarter century. Instead, I'll broach

Right now is probably a good time to clear up one point. Contrary to some opinions, handgun cartridges do not fall into any special niche when it comes to how they perform on game. Ballistically, handgun cartridges must stand comparison with rifle cartridges. The fact that a certain handgun has a bore the size of a sewer pipe and shoots a cartridge that belches fire, roars like a jet engine and kicks like a loco mule has nothing whatsoever to do with its performance on game. It may be the hardest kickin', most powerful handgun available, but when it's compared ballistically with any of our better hunting rifle cartridges, it'll come off a poor second. We can't rewrite the book on ballistics to support our preju-

beyond that at which handguns can be effective. There isn't a handgun cartridge around that will consistently produce one-shot kills on elk and moose at over 100 yards. And, those that do the job at 100 yards are not only few and far between, but are for the most part available only in specialty pistols.

You must understand that my concern is for the game animals themselves and for the image we project to the world about the sport of handgun hunting. I could care less about a handgunner who goes after dangerous game and gets himself mauled. That's his fault. The same is true of the guy who fails to use enough gun, then moans about his mis-

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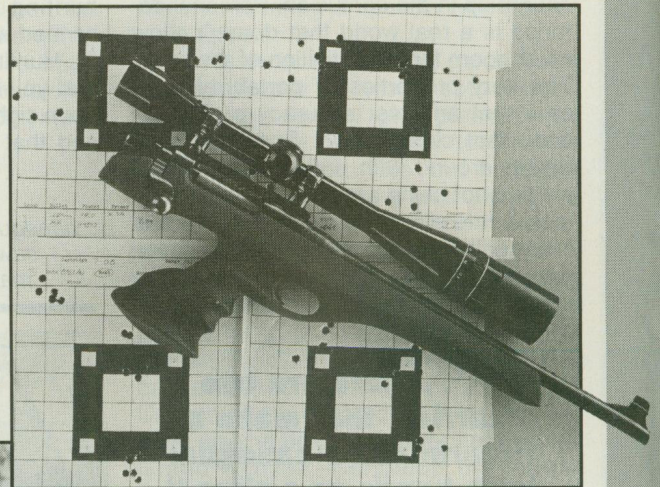
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fortune at losing a trophy buck or bull. What's important is that such hunters have deviated from what should be the unspoken creed of any sportsman worth his salt—to dispatch his quarry with a single, well-placed shot. To knowingly do anything else is to admit a total disregard for the animal being hunted.

Not only must the handgun/cartridge combination you use be powerful enough to handle the job you have for it, but it must be accurate enough that you can place your shots with confidence to effect quick, one-shot kills at the maximum anticipated range. It never ceases

With a 6X scope this Remington XP-100 (right) with H-S Precision stock in 7mm BR proved it is capable of minute-of-angle groups at 100 yds.

Gunwriters like Milek have so popularized the single-shot pistol that Remington now offers the "Varmint Special" in .223 Remington (below).



to amaze me that the same hunter who goes into convulsions of frustration if his deer rifle won't hold five shots in under two inches at 100 yards will dance with glee when the handgun he intends to hunt deer with will barely hold five shots in an eight inch circle at 100 yards. With few exceptions I set the same standards for my handguns as I do for my hunting rifles. If the handgun won't perform, I get rid of it. The only exceptions I make to this rule are for close-range hunting. A handgun to be used on small game or varmints out to say 50 yards must be capable of three-inch groups at this distance, and I'll settle for four-inch, 50-yard groups from a revolver I intend to use on deer-size game at this range. But when I get out there to 100 yards, things must tighten up. I won't hunt small varmints at long range with a pistol that won't hold five shots in one inch or under at 100 yards, and all of my big game hunting handguns must produce 100-yard, five-shot groups no larger than two inches.

Make no mistake about it, there are a lot of pistols and cartridges out there

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that are capable of delivering the accuracy I require of them. However, whether they will or not is often dependent upon the sights being used. As far as I'm concerned, fixed open sights have no place in the hunting field. I'll use fully adjustable open sights for small game and varmint shooting out to about 50 yards, and good open sights are okay for hunting

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The custom bolt action (top) is a wild looker with striped stock. The T/C pistol (R) has interchangeable barrels.

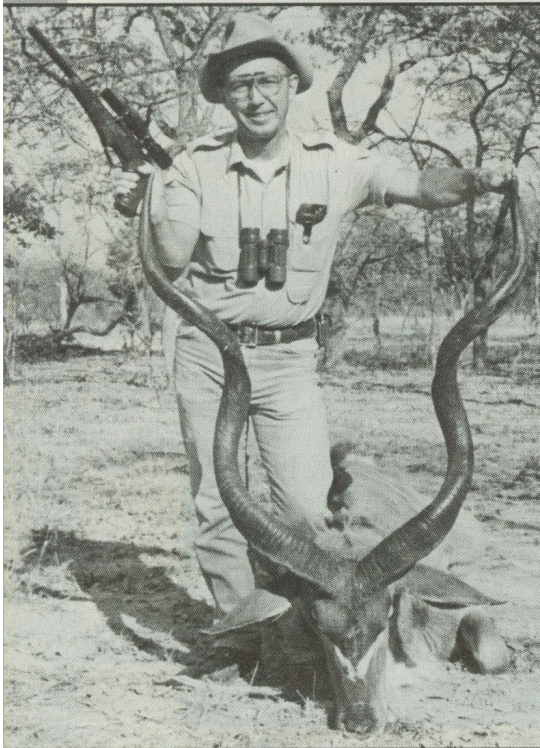
The Remington XP-100 has become such a popular pistol with handgun hunters that an aftermarket industry has sprung up to supply custom stocks, scopes and rings.

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big game out to 75 or so. But, once you pass that 75 yard mark, there's nothing that does the job like a good long eye relief pistol scope.

I'll be the first to admit that a pistol scope adds bulk to a handgun and detracts from the traditional good looks of some pistols. That's why I seldom scope any handgun I intend to use at short range. However, scopes have played a major role in extending the effective range of the handgun and, for any long-

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For hunting kudu in Africa, Milek chose a T/C Contender in .35 Rem., with Burris 3X scope to take this excellent kudu.

range work, their advantages considerably outweigh the disadvantages. A scope does many things. First, it magnifies your target, so you see better. Second, it places the reticle and the target on the same plane so both the target and the aiming device are in sharp focus. Third, the reticle covers a small area, even at 200 yards—much smaller than that covered by the front blade of an open sight, thus a lot of shooter error is eliminated. Granted, handgun scope technology is in its infancy as compared to that of rifle scopes, but the long eye relief pistol scope of today is many times superior to

what it was just a few short years ago, and if you buy the best, you can count on it to perform when the chips are down.

It should go without saying that a hunting handgun must be strong and reliable, capable of taking extremes of heat and cold, dust and moisture in stride and absorbing the inevitable knocks of the field without breaking down. This is a pretty tall order, but I find that most of the quality handguns on the market today will pass this test without difficulty.

This brings us to the subject of which handguns, at least handgun designs, are best for hunting? If accuracy and long-range capability were the only prerequisites, there's no doubt that the specialty single-shot pistols like the Thompson/Center Contender and Remington XP-100 would win hands down. However, these aren't always the foremost considerations. There are times when quick-handling characteristics or the need for fast second and third shots are equally important. In some situations there's nothing better than an open-sighted big-bore revolver, while other times a good semi-automatic .22 Long Rifle is just what the doctor ordered. I guess what I'm getting at is that there's no way that anyone can say this handgun or that one is best for hunting. The gun, the cartridge, and the sighting equipment must be matched to the particular hunting situ-

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ation. Obviously, this opens the whole field of available handguns to the hunter, making him the most versatile user of handguns in the world.

What all of this boils down to is that to me a handgun is a sporting firearm, one to be used in the hunting field. Handgun hunting is a way of life for me and it's gratifying to know that it's one of our fastest-growing shooting sports. When used properly, a handgun is an efficient hunting firearm. I have no time for those who, either through misuse of the handgun or their failure to confine its use on game to within its limitations, bring about criticism of the handgun hunting sport from inside and outside the ranks of American sportsmen. There are few handguns that the hunter can't find some bona fide use for in the field. The trick is to choose the right handgun and cartridge for the job, then to be wise enough to know when you're asking it for performance beyond its capabilities or yours.